

BLM SCOPING REPORT

Southern California Edison's West of Devers Upgrade Project Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, California

NEPA Lead Agency:
U.S. Bureau of Land Management



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1. Introduction

This Scoping Report documents the public scoping effort conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for the West of Devers (WOD) Upgrade Project. Southern California Edison (SCE), the project applicant, has filed an application for approval to construct the WOD project on BLM-administered land. As part of the project review process, the BLM in conjunction with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) will prepare a joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) that will evaluate the potential environmental impacts of the project in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

In compliance with NEPA, the BLM held a 30-day public scoping period, which started after publication of the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on July 1, 2014. Scoping allows the public and regulatory agencies an opportunity to comment on the scope of the EIR/EIS and to identify issues that should be addressed in the environmental document. This report documents the issues and concerns expressed during the public scoping meeting held on July 16, 2014 and the written comments received from the public, community organizations, and governmental agencies during the July 2014 public scoping period.

In compliance with CEQA, the CPUC held a separate 30-day public scoping period in May/June 2014. In May 2014, the CPUC held four public scoping meetings. The CPUC published the CPUC Scoping Report in July 2014, which summarizes the results of this first scoping period.

1.1 Purpose of Scoping

The process of determining the focus and content of the EIR/EIS is known as scoping. Scoping helps to identify the range of actions, alternatives, environmental effects, and mitigation measures to be analyzed in depth, and eliminates from detailed study those issues that are not pertinent to the final decision on the proposed project. The scoping process is not intended to resolve differences of opinion regarding the proposed project or evaluate its merits. Instead, the process allows all interested parties to express their concerns regarding the proposed project and thereby ensures that all opinions and comments are considered in the environmental analysis. Scoping is an effective way to bring together and address the concerns of the public, affected agencies, and other interested parties. Members of the public, relevant federal, State, regional and local agencies, interests groups, community organizations, and other interested parties may participate in the scoping process by providing comments or recommendations regarding issues to be investigated in the EIR/EIS.

Comments received during the scoping process are part of the public record as documented in this scoping report. The comments and questions received during both public scoping periods have been reviewed and considered by the BLM and CPUC in determining the appropriate scope of issues to be addressed in the EIR/EIS and in the selection of alternatives to be carried forward for further analysis.

The purpose of scoping for the WOD project was to:

- Inform the public and relevant public agencies about the project, NEPA and CEQA requirements, and the environmental impact analysis process;
- Solicit input on the WOD project for evaluation in the EIR/EIS; and
- Update the mailing list of public agencies and individuals interested in future project meetings and notices.

1.2 Summary of the Project

The West of Devers Upgrade Project would be located primarily within the existing West of Devers transmission corridor in the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties including the Morongo Band of Mission Indians reservation and the cities of Banning, Beaumont, Calimesa, Colton, Grand Terrace, Loma Linda, and Redlands. The West of Devers corridor traverses residential, commercial, agricultural, recreation, and open space land uses.

The WOD project as proposed by SCE includes the following major components:

- **Removal and upgrade** of existing 220 kV transmission lines primarily within the existing WOD corridor in six segments (see Notice of Preparation figures in Appendix A). The project segments are described as follows:
 - **Segment 1: San Bernardino.** Two existing 220 kV double-circuit lines include 45 double-circuit towers (average height 136 feet) that would be removed, and installation of 61 towers (average height 135 feet) that would be installed within the existing right-of-way (ROW).
 - **Segment 2: Colton and Loma Linda.** One existing 220 kV line (average height 139 feet) would be removed and rebuilt, including the removal of 29 double-circuit towers and installation of 35 towers (average height 146 feet).
 - **Segment 3: San Timoteo Canyon.** Removal of three existing sets of 220 kV towers and construction of two sets of towers, requiring removal of 116 individual towers (average height 86 feet for single-circuit towers and 139 feet for double-circuit towers) and installation of 133 towers (average height 143 feet).
 - **Segment 4: Beaumont and Banning.** Removal of approximately 175 structures (average height 90 feet for single-circuit towers and 139 feet for double-circuit towers), and installation of approximately 136 towers (average height 142 feet).
 - **Segment 5: Morongo Tribal Lands and Vicinity.** Six miles of this 9.5-mile segment are on Morongo tribal lands. On the tribal lands, SCE was originally considering two route options, but as of April 7, 2014, the tribe indicated to SCE that it designated Route Option 1 as its preferred route alternative. In this segment, approximately 137 structures would be removed (average height 83 feet for single-circuit towers and 140 feet for double-circuit towers) and approximately 108 structures (average height 144 feet) would be installed. In this segment, three miles of the existing ROW on Morongo land would be abandoned and relocated to the south, near the I-10 Freeway (this route is Route Option 1).
 - **Segment 6: Whitewater and Devers Substation.** Removal of approximately 116 structures (average height 83 feet for single-circuit towers and 141 feet for double-circuit towers) and installation of 93 towers (average height 157 feet).
- **Substation equipment upgrades** at Devers, El Casco, Etiwanda, San Bernardino, and Vista Substations to accommodate increased power transfer on 220 kV lines.
- **Subtransmission upgrades** would include removal and relocation of 2 miles of existing 66 kV lines and upgrades at Timoteo and Tennessee 66/12 kV Substations to accommodate the relocated 66 kV line.

- Electric **distribution line upgrades** would include removal and relocation of 4 miles of existing 12 kV lines.
- Installation of **telecommunication lines** and equipment for the protection, monitoring, and control of transmission lines and substation equipment.

1.3 Scoping Report Organization

This scoping report includes four main sections and appendices, as described below:

- Section 1 provides an introduction to the report and describes the purpose of scoping and a brief overview of the WOD project considered for analysis in the EIR/EIS.
- Section 2 provides information on the scoping meetings and outreach resources.
- Section 3 summarizes the comments received and issues raised during the scoping comment period.
- Section 4 describes the next steps in the EIR/EIS process.
- Appendices consist of all the supporting materials used during scoping as well as copies of comment letters. The appendices include copies of the Notice of Intent, meeting materials provided at the public scoping meeting, newspaper advertisements, and a summary of all comments received during this second public scoping process.

2. Project Scoping

This section describes the methods used to notify the public and agencies about the scoping process conducted for WOD. It outlines how information was made available for public and agency review and identifies the different avenues available for providing comments on the project (meetings, fax, email, mail, and phone).

2.1 Notice of Intent

As required by federal regulation 40 CFR 1508.22, the BLM issued a Notice of Intent stating its intention to prepare an EIR/EIS. The BLM published the Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on July 1, 2014, which initiated the BLM public scoping period on the WOD project. The NOI summarized the proposed project, stated the agency's intention to prepare a joint EIR/EIS, and requested comments from interested parties (see Appendix A). The 30-day scoping period ended on July 31, 2014.

2.2 Tribal Government Consultation

In June 2014, the BLM sent out letters to 14 tribal government representatives to initiate government-to-government consultation for this project. The letter provides initial notification regarding the project, explains the role of the BLM, and invites the tribal government to enter into government-to-government consultation. The intent is to identify any issues or concerns the tribe may have about the project.

2.3 Public Scoping Meeting

The BLM held one public scoping meeting on July 16, 2014. The scoping meeting provided an opportunity for the public, community and interest groups, and government agencies to obtain more information on the project, to learn more about the NEPA and CEQA environmental review processes, to ask questions regarding the project, and to provide comment on the project.

Meeting Location and Handouts

Table 1 presents information about the scoping meeting held for the West of Devers Upgrade Project in this second scoping period. Handouts and information materials available at the meeting are listed below. Refer to Appendices A and B for copies of these materials.

- Notice of Preparation
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Project Fact Sheet
- Frequently Asked Questions
- Self-addressed Comment Form
- Speaker Registration Card

Table 1. Public Scoping Meeting

Date and Time	Location	Signed-in	Speakers	Comment Letters
Wednesday, July 16, 2014 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm	Banning Banning City Hall – Council Chambers 99 E. Ramsey Street, Banning, CA 92220	16	6	2

Other information was also made available for public review, which included an overview map of the project alignment, as well as a series of maps that provided more detailed information regarding the project segments. Also, the Frequently Asked Questions handout was translated into Spanish and available at the meeting for review.

Press Release

The BLM prepared and issued a press release announcing the start of the public scoping period and announcing the date, time, and location of the public scoping meeting. The BLM submitted this notice to print media for publication.

Scoping Meeting Notice

The BLM distributed a scoping mailer (postcard) to approximately 13,300 federal, State, regional, and local agencies, and elected officials, community and environmental organizations, Native American groups, and property owners. The postcard notice included a brief description about the project and provided information regarding the date, time and location of the public meeting. The mailing included the following approximate distribution:

- 142 agency representatives (includes over 71 different agencies)
- 37 environmental groups/organizations
- 5 tribal government representatives (2 different tribal governments)
- 30 elected officials
- 12,600 property owners within 600 feet of the project route alignment
- 421 other interested parties

2.4 Outreach

The BLM and CPUC provided opportunities for the public and agencies to ask questions or comment on the project outside of meetings. A project information hotline, email address, and website were established and available during the public comment period. Information on these additional outreach efforts are described below.

Project Information Hotline

To offer another opportunity to inquire about the public scoping meetings or the proposed project, a project-specific phone line (888-456-0254) was established to answer questions and take verbal comments from those unable to attend the meeting. Telephone messages were retrieved and all calls were promptly addressed. The phone line also allowed for comments to be submitted in writing by fax instead of mail. Only inquiries (questions) were provided through the phone line; no comments were received through this phone line (voice or fax) regarding the scope of the EIR/EIS.

Email Address

An email address (westofdevers@aspeneq.com) was established for the project to provide another means of submitting comments on the scope and content of the EIR/EIS. The email address was provided on meeting handouts and posted on the website. Comments received by email have been considered and incorporated into this report.

Internet Website

The BLM established a project-specific website to provide ongoing information about the proposed project. The website provided, and will continue to provide throughout the project, another public venue to learn about the project. The website will remain a public information resource for the project and will announce future public meetings and hearings. The website address is:

<http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/transmission/WestOfDeversProject.html>

Distribution List/Database

The BLM and CPUC have compiled a comprehensive project-specific mailing list with over 13,300 entries. The mailing list/database was updated after the scoping meetings and the scoping comment period; the mailing list was reviewed to confirm all meeting attendees and all individuals, organizations, and agencies that submitted written comments were on the list. This mailing list will continue to be used throughout the environmental review process for the project to distribute public notices and will continue to be updated to ensure all interested parties are notified of key project milestones.

3. Scoping Comments

This section summarizes the key issues raised during the public comment period. A total of 12 written comment letters were submitted and 6 individuals presented oral comments during the public scoping meeting. Appendix C of this report includes a summary of all comments received on the WOD project including the oral comments presented at the public scoping meeting. Appendix D includes copies of the written comment letters submitted on the project. The key issues raised are discussed below.

Aesthetics/Visual

One commenter requested that the applicant consider the aesthetics of the neighborhood when building towers.

Conflicts with Existing Land Uses

The project bisects the Colorado River Aqueduct, and thus, there was some concern that the project could impact the ongoing operation, maintenance, and repair of the aqueduct. The Metropolitan Water District requested that design plans be reviewed and approved by them and that the EIR/EIS consider potential impacts to the aqueduct. The California Department of Water Resources noted that permits may be required if any improvements encroach on the Colorado River Aqueduct right-of-way.

Several commenters raised a concern with the placement of the towers closer to existing homes and wanted to know why SCE could not place the towers farther away from existing residences.

One commenter noted that they appreciated that the transmission towers would be placed far from the Interstate 10 freeway and not on the hillsides. They felt their area was one of the few remaining areas where residents got an unobstructed view of the hillsides.

One commenter requested that the two transmission line corridors near his property be consolidated into one existing corridor. He thought this would reduce the environmental footprint and be easier to maintain.

One commenter noted that the proposed location of towers would be in the middle of their property and would limit their ability to build on their property or to sell the property for full market value.

Social/Economic

Commenters expressed concern with the project's impact on property values because of towers being moved closer to homes.

Commenters expressed concern with security/safety and general wellbeing when living near an electrical transmission corridor.

Fire, EMF, and Other Hazards

CAL FIRE noted that the area has a history of wildfires and requested to be notified of construction activities and suggested that a plan be put in place to coordinate a response to fires if helicopters will be used in construction.

Several concerns were raised regarding the safety of the transmission lines especially if they are placed closer to homes and wanted to know if the lines would increase the potential for exposure to EMF with the new towers. One commenter requested that the EIR/EIS study the potential health risks associated with transmission towers.

One commenter noted that if there could be no guarantee that the transmission towers would not pose a health risk, then the project applicant should buy all of the properties close to transmission towers. Some of properties are rentals and no one will want to rent a house with a transmission line next to it.

One commenter stated that he wanted to see measures that address survival of the transmission lines when under terrorist bombs or other disaster designed to wipe out the electrical grid.

Construction-Related (Dust, Traffic)

Commenters expressed concern with construction dust and requested that dust suppression measures be included in the EIR/EIS.

Some commenters expressed concern with the potential for damaging local roads and increasing traffic.

Biological Resources

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife requested a thorough evaluation and mitigation of impacts to sensitive species in the project area and also asked for the EIR/EIS to consider the two Multiple-Species Habitat Conservation Plans that are in place in the project area.

Another request was for the EIR/EIS to evaluate the project's impact on common ravens, red-tailed hawks, and golden eagles. In the evaluation of these species, the commenter asked that other issues be taken into consideration, such as global warming.

4. Next Steps in EIR/EIS Process

While scoping is the initial step in the environmental review process, additional opportunities to comment on the WOD EIR/EIS will be provided. The BLM and CPUC will request additional public input when the Draft EIR/EIS is released, and during public meetings for the Draft EIR/EIS. Table 2 presents a proposed schedule for the EIR/EIS, and identifies where in the process the public and agencies can provide additional input in the environmental review process.

Table 2. EIR/EIS Schedule

Event/Document	Purpose	Approximate Date
Completed Events & Documents		
CPUC Scoping Notice of Preparation	Release of NOP	Notified interested parties and agencies of the CPUC's intent to prepare an EIR.
	Public scoping period	Held 30-day public scoping period on the proposed project to provide for public comments on the scope of the EIR/EIS.
CPUC Scoping Meetings	Held 4 scoping meetings	Presented information on the WOD project and provided opportunity for public and agency comments in a public forum.
CPUC Scoping Report		Documents public and agency comments on the WOD project and environmental issues of concern to the public and agencies.
BLM Scoping Notice of Intent	Release of NOI	Notifies federal agencies and interested parties of the BLM and CPUC's intent to prepare an EIR/EIS.
	Public scoping period	A second public scoping period was provided.

Table 2. EIR/EIS Schedule

Event/Document		Purpose	Approximate Date
BLM Scoping Meeting	Held one scoping meeting	One additional scoping meeting was conducted approximately two weeks after publication of the NOI in the Federal Register.	July 16, 2014
BLM Scoping Report		Documents public and agency comments made during the BLM scoping period.	August 2014
Upcoming Events & Documents			
Draft EIR/EIS	Release of Draft EIR/EIS	Presents impacts and mitigation for the WOD project and its alternatives.	Early 2015
	Public Review Period	Minimum 45-day public review period on the Draft EIR/EIS.	Early 2015
	Draft EIR/EIS public meetings	Allows for public comment on Draft EIR/EIS in a public venue.	Early 2015
Final EIR/EIS	Release of Final EIR/EIS	Final EIR/EIS, with response to comments, issued by the CPUC and BLM.	Second quarter 2015
Decisions on Project		Commission certifies EIR and issues a Proposed Decision for public review. Full Commission votes and a Decision is published.	Spring 2015
		BLM issues Record of Decision.	Spring 2015