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4.4 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

Would the Project:		Potentially Significant Impact	Potentially Significant Unless APMs Incorporated	Less than significant Impact	No Impact
a.	Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☐	☑	☐
b.	Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife or US Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☐	☑	☐
c.	Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	☐	☐	☑	☐
d.	Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?	☐	☐	☑	☐
e.	Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	☐	☐	☐	☑
f.	Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☑

4.4.1 Introduction

This section of the PEA describes the biological resources in the vicinity of the Proposed Project, and identifies potential impacts to habitats and species that could result from the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Project. Additionally, potential impacts to sensitive vegetation communities, jurisdictional wetlands and waters, and migratory wildlife corridors are addressed.

The Proposed Project would incorporate the project design features and ordinary construction/operating restrictions (as outlined in Section 3.8), including *SDG&E's Subregional* NCCP. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* is a Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) permitted under Section 10A of the Federal ESA for incidental take and a NCCP permit under a management

authorization pursuant to Section 2835 of the California Fish and Wildlife Code. SDG&E entered into an Implementation Agreement with the USFWS and CDFW, respectively, for the management and conservation of multiple species and their associated habitats as established according to the federal and state ESAs and the state's NCCP Act. Through the avoidance of resources, application of protective measures and avoidance and minimization measures outlined in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, and the SDG&E Enhancement and Monitoring Program, the Proposed Project's impacts to biological resources would be less than significant.

4.4.2 Methodology

4.4.2.1 Literature Review

Prior to conducting the field surveys, existing documentation relevant to the Proposed Project and the surrounding areas was reviewed. A list of special status plants and animals was prepared for the Proposed Project.

Special Status Species

The most recent records of the CDFW California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) and the California Native Plant Society's (CNPS) Electronic Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California were reviewed for the quadrangles containing and surrounding the Proposed Project (*Santa Ysabel* and *Ramona* California USGS 7.5-minute quadrangles). CNDDB contains records of reported occurrences of federal or state listed species, proposed endangered or threatened species, Fully Protected (FP) Species, Federal Birds of Conservation Concern, California Species of Special Concern (SSC), or otherwise sensitive species or habitats that may occur within or in the vicinity of the Proposed Project. A complete list of these special status species is included in Appendix 4.4-A, Biological Technical Report (Appendix B, CNDDB Sensitive Plant Species Occurrence Table and Appendix C, CNDDB Sensitive Wildlife Species Occurrence Table).

Critical Habitat

The USFWS critical habitat areas for listed species were searched using GIS shapefiles provided by the USFWS within three miles of the Proposed Project alignment.

Drainages and Other Water Features

The desk top assessment for drainages and other water resources consisted of a review of the U.S. Geological Service (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic quadrangle containing the site, the USFWS National Wetlands Inventory (NWI) maps, and a review of aerial photographs.

Soils

The USDA, National Resource Conservation Science (NRCS) Web Soil Survey and National List of Hydric Soils, was used to assess soils mapped along the Proposed Project alignment, and GIS data was used to create maps. As prescribed by the 1987 United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Wetland Delineation Manual and the 2008 Regional Supplement to the

USACE Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region, Version 2.0, all available lists of hydric soils were referenced to identify any occurrence of hydric soils listed within the Proposed Project alignment. The national, state, and local hydric soils lists were used along with local soil survey maps for this assessment.

Field Surveys

Chambers Group collected general field reconnaissance data throughout the period from the spring of 2010 through the spring of 2012. Field data were recorded during sensitive plant and wildlife surveys. Focused plant surveys were conducted between April and September 2010 to cover the blooming periods of the sensitive annual plant species (perennial shrub species could be observed throughout the year). Focused wildlife surveys were conducted between May and September 2010. Additional surveys along the Proposed Project were conducted in 2011 on May 2, July 11 through 15, and November 8 and in 2012 on February 3, 7, 13, and 23 during pre-activity surveys; and from July 11 through 19, 2011, during the jurisdictional delineation surveys.

Focused Plant Surveys

Due to the presence of environmental conditions suitable for multiple sensitive plant species to occur within the Proposed Project, a series of focused rare plant surveys for specific target species was completed according to the guidelines set forth by CNPS. Three separate surveys were conducted within the Proposed Project area to capture the blooming periods for each of the targeted species with a potential to occur onsite. The areas surveyed (Survey Area) consisted of a 150-foot buffer around the power line pole centerline, which was extended to a 250-foot radius around each pole where the overhead line makes an angle greater than two degrees. The additional buffer was surveyed to include potential additional work space that is typically required during operation and maintenance work at angle points within the overhead lines.

Focused rare plant surveys were performed in accordance with survey protocols set forth by CDFW, CNPS, and USFWS Guidelines for Conducting and Reporting Botanical Inventories for Federally Listed, Proposed, and Candidate Plants. Species identified as being sensitive and having the potential to occur along the survey routes were reviewed by Chambers Group botanists prior to starting surveys each day. Botanists walked within the Survey Area approximately 30 feet (9 meter) apart and visually surveyed for any signs of the targeted plant species. A complete inventory of all plant species observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area was prepared. Vegetation communities were recorded on aerial photographs and mapped data was then digitized in GIS. Sensitive plant species observed during the survey were documented by counting individuals or estimating numbers for larger populations, characterizing the approximate population size, and recording a GPS location. Comprehensive lists of plants observed during the surveys can be found in Appendix 4.4-A (Appendix D, Plant Species Observed List).

The first round of spring surveys commenced on April 20, 2010, and concluded June 4, 2010. The second round of surveys commenced on June 7, 2010, and concluded on June 30, 2010. The third round of surveys commenced on August 2, 2010; continued through August 17, 2010.

Jurisdictional Delineation Survey

Chambers Group scientists conducted surveys along the Proposed Project, targeting suspected jurisdictional areas identified during the literature review from aerial and USGS topographic maps. Potential USACE, Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and CDFW jurisdictional areas were field-checked for the presence of definable channels and/or wetland vegetation, riparian habitat, soils, and hydrology. Field checks were not limited to suspected jurisdictional areas identified during the literature review; the entire Proposed Project Survey Area was assessed. "Waters of the United States" were identified pursuant to criteria outlined in Section 401 and Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA). "Waters of the State" regulated by CDFW were identified pursuant to criteria outlined in Section 1600 of the CDFW Code.

Potential wetland habitats were evaluated using the methodology set forth in the 1987 USACE Wetlands Delineation Manual and the 2008 Regional Supplement to the USACE Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region, Version 2.0. The lateral extent of a jurisdictional drainage feature was also measured. USACE and RWQCB traditionally use the upper limit of the Ordinary High Water Mark (OHWM), by identifying signs of shelving, drift lines, and disturbed vegetation. Under the Rapanos court decision, USACE now requires a fact-specific significant nexus analysis to be performed for dry or ephemeral washes (non-Relatively Permanent Waters [RPW]) in southern California to determine the extent of USACE jurisdiction on a given project area. Connectivity was investigated and determined through a "desktop" study by utilizing the USGS topographic maps, USFWS NWI maps, and aerial imagery. CDFW traditionally uses the presence of a defined bed and bank and associated vegetation.

Wetland data was recorded onto standardized Wetland Determination Data Forms – Arid West Region data forms. In order to formally determine the presence or absence of wetlands, upland features were also recorded onto the standardized data sheets. Sample plots were established, and recorded data included plant species with estimated percent area coverage within each vegetation stratum (i.e., tree, sapling/shrub, herb, woody vine), soil profiles were investigated (where feasible), and evidence of hydrology was recorded. All delineation data was digitized for the precise mapping of jurisdictional areas. All data on jurisdictional determinations and wetland delineations were reproduced using GIS software and displayed on aerial maps.

Chambers Group biologists Nichole Cervin and Maya Mazon conducted the water resources survey from July 11 through July 14 and on July 18 and 19, 2011. During the survey the biologists drove and/or walked the access roads associated with the Proposed Project. Any potential jurisdictional feature observed within a 50-foot radius of a proposed pole or facility location was recorded. This 50-foot radius survey area was determined to include permanent and temporary work areas of pole installation and removal. In the field, boundaries and dimensions of jurisdictional features were recorded on aerial photographs, sub-meter GPS units, tablet computers, and field notes. Features within the 50-foot radius survey area were investigated for the presence of drainages, including culverts, corrugated metal pipe drains, reinforced concrete pipes, V-ditches, water bodies, riparian habitats, potential wetlands, and connectivity. The biologists noted alternatives if a proposed pole or facilities location may impact a jurisdictional water feature and whether the feature could be avoided during construction.

Sensitive Wildlife Surveys

Chambers Group conducted habitat assessment surveys for state- and federal-listed species with the potential to occur in the Proposed Project Survey Area. Based on the habitat assessments, protocol-level focused surveys were conducted for species with a moderate to high potential to occur within the Proposed Project. Methodologies for these species are found below.

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly (*Euphydryas editha quino*; QCB)

Permitted Quino checkersopt butterfly (QCB) biologists Michael Klein (TE-837760-6), Kris Alberts (TE-039640-2), and Paul Morrissey conducted the QCB habitat assessment in accordance with the *USFWS Quino Checkerspot Survey Protocol Information*. The biologists surveyed the Proposed Project route by helicopter, which allowed for an efficient and comprehensive aerial search of the Proposed Project landscape. The helicopter flew low enough over the Proposed Project area to allow for visual determination of the ground cover type and vegetation density. The biologists then mapped QCB suitable and non-suitable areas of the Proposed Project on aerial maps in the helicopter during the survey flight. The helicopter was determined by USFWS to be a suitable method of conducting a protocol habitat assessment. The helicopter QCB habitat assessment was then ground-truthed by a USFWS permitted QCB survey biologist on foot.

The QCB focused surveys were conducted in accordance with protocol set forth by the *USFWS Quino Checkerspot Survey Protocol Information* and the USFWS *Year 2005 Quino Survey Areas*. The flight season varies regionally and annually; therefore, coordination with permitted biologists was conducted to determine the beginning and end of the flight season, determined by identified QCB at known locations. If a QCB was detected at a site during the first five surveys, additional surveys were not required. If a QCB was not detected during the first five surveys, but the QCB flight season continued (as determined by conditions listed above), then additional surveys were conducted through the end of the flight season. Each survey segment was surveyed weekly at a minimum of five times during the QCB flight season. Certain segments were surveyed more than five times depending on QCB host plant conditions, nectar source availability, and whether QCB were still observed flying at nearby reference sites beyond the fifth survey.

Potential QCB habitat assessment surveys for the protocol focused surveys along the Proposed Project were conducted by USFWS permitted QCB biologist Greg Chapman (TE-075112-1). Comprehensive results of these surveys were presented in the *Quino Checkerspot Butterfly 45-Day Focused Survey Report for the San Diego Gas & Electric Cleveland National Forest Project, San Diego County, California* prepared by Chambers Group.

Coastal California Gnatcatcher (*Polioptila californica californica*; CAGN)

Permitted coastal California gnatcatcher (CAGN) Chambers Group biologists Kris Alberts (TE-039640-2) and Paul Morrissey conducted a helicopter survey of the Proposed Project area to locate species-specific Survey Areas. CAGN habitat suitability was assessed during this helicopter flyover. All sage scrub habitat areas that intersected the Proposed Project Survey Area were reviewed for the presence of suitable habitat necessary for breeding. Handheld GPS

units and aerial maps were used to outline portions of the Proposed Project that would be surveyed during the 2010 CAGN focused surveys. Areas classified as potential CAGN habitat were further assessed during the first round of focused surveys by CAGN permitted biologists.

All CAGN focused surveys were conducted by biologists holding the necessary federal ESA section 10(a)(1)(A) survey permit. Surveys were conducted according to the *USFWS Presence or Absence Survey Guidelines*. Surveys were conducted below 2,500 feet in elevation within areas primarily consisting of coastal sage scrub. The majority of plant species found in coastal sage scrub are low-growing, drought-deciduous shrubs and subshrubs, including California sagebrush (*Artemisia californica*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), and sages. Areas containing alluvial fan scrub, chaparral, grassland, or riparian habitats adjacent to or intermixed with coastal sage scrub were also surveyed. Surveys were limited to areas located within the range of this species.

Six focused surveys were conducted at least one week apart in areas of suitable CAGN habitat between the hours of 0600 and 1200. Surveys were conducted by Kris Alberts (TE-039640-1), Travis Cooper (TE-170389-1) and Kris Alberts' sub-permittee Shannan Shaffer and accompanied by Paul Morrissey, Laurie Gorman (TE 233367-1) and Seth Reimers. Periods of excessive or abnormal heat, wind, fog, or other inclement weather were avoided; and no more than 80 acres (32 hectares) were surveyed per biologist per day. Sites with deep canyons, ridge lines, steep terrain, and thick shrub cover were surveyed more slowly. Surveys were conducted by permitted biologists slowly walking transects within suitable CAGN habitat within the Survey Areas and using binoculars to achieve 100 percent visual coverage. Taped CAGN vocalizations were used only to initially locate individuals, and tapes were not used frequently or to elicit further behaviors from any CAGN present. Information on any CAGN individuals observed was recorded to document the numbers and locations of paired or unpaired territorial males, ages and sexes of all birds observed, and nesting behavior. Comprehensive results of these surveys were presented in the *Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Survey Report for the San Diego Gas & Electric Company Cleveland National Forest Master Services Permit Project San Diego County, California* prepared by Chambers Group.

4.4.3 Existing Conditions

4.4.3.1 Regulatory Setting

Federal

Bureau of Land Management Sensitive Species

BLM Sensitive Species are species that are not federally listed that occur on BLM public lands, where BLM "has the capability to significantly affect the conservation status of the species through management." BLM's policy is to "ensure that actions authorized, funded, or carried out do not contribute to the need to list any of these species as threatened or endangered." BLM offices maintain a list of special status plant and wildlife species specific to BLM management activities.

Clean Water Act of 1977 (Public Law 95-217)

The CWA governs discharge or dredge of materials in the waters of the United States, and it governs pollution control and water quality of waterways throughout the United States. Its intent, in part, is to restore and maintain the biological integrity of the nation's waters. The goals and standards of the CWA are enforced through permit provisions.

Pursuant to Section 404 of the CWA, the USACE regulates the discharge of dredged and/or fill material into waters of the United States. Waters of the United States include navigable waterways and wetlands adjacent to navigable waterways, and non-navigable waterways and wetlands adjacent to non-navigable waters that are contiguous with navigable waterways. The term "waters of the United States" is defined by 33 CFR Part 328 and currently includes (1) all navigable waters (including all waters subject to the ebb and flow of the tide), (2) all interstate waters and wetlands, (3) all other waters (e.g., lakes, rivers, intermittent streams) that could affect interstate or foreign commerce, (4) all impoundments of waters mentioned above, (5) all tributaries to waters mentioned above, (6) the territorial seas, and (7) all wetlands adjacent to waters mentioned above.

Wetlands are defined by 33 CFR 328.3(b) as "those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support...a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions." In the absence of wetlands, the limits of USACE jurisdiction in non-tidal waters, including intermittent RPW streams, extend to the OHWM which is defined by 33 CFR 328.3(e) as:

> "*...that line on the shore established by the fluctuation of water and indicated by physical characteristics such as clear, natural line impressed on the bank, shelving, changes in the character of soil, destruction of terrestrial vegetation, the presence of litter and debris, or other appropriate means that consider the characteristics of the surrounding areas."*

On January 9, 2001, the United States Supreme Court ruled (in *Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers*) (SWANCC) that the USACE jurisdiction does not extend to "isolated, non-navigable, intra-state waters or wetlands," including but not limited to isolated ponds, reservoirs, and wetlands. A joint guidance by the USEPA and USACE was issued on June 5, 2007, regarding the Court's decision on the consolidated cases Rapanos v. United States and Carabell v. United States (126 S. Ct. 2208 (2006)) (Rapanos), to clarify circumstances where a CWA Section 404 permit would be required before conducting activities in wetlands, tributaries, and other waters.

The State of California regulates discharge of material into waters of the State pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA. The State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) and the local RWQCB are the relevant permitting agencies. Waters of the State determined to be jurisdictional as surface and/or ground waters, if impacted, would require a 401 Certification if a USACE 404 permit is required. Limits of jurisdiction include wetland boundaries and the OHWMs of traditionally navigable waters (TNWs), RPWs, and non-RPWs.

Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973

The Federal ESA of 1973 protects endangered and threatened species by prohibiting Federal actions that would jeopardize the continued existence of such species or result in the destruction or adverse modification of habitat of such species. Section 9 of ESA prohibits the "take" of endangered wildlife, where take is defined as "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, collect, or attempt to engage in such conduct" (50 CFR Section 17.3). For endangered plants, the statute prohibits removing, possessing, maliciously damaging, or destroying any endangered plant on federal land and removing, cutting, digging-up, damaging, or destroying any endangered plant on non-federal land in knowing violation of state law (16 USC 1538).

Under Section 7(a)(2) of the ESA, federal agencies must consult with federal resource agencies (i.e., USFWS) if listed species and/or critical habitat could be impacted by Proposed Project activity. USFWS then would prepare a Biological Opinion on how the action would affect the species and/or its critical habitat and would suggest reasonable and prudent measures or alternatives to minimize take of a listed species, avoid jeopardizing the continued existence of the species, or avoid adversely modifying its critical habitat.

Forest Service Sensitive Species

Forest Service Sensitive species are plant and animal species identified by a Regional Forester for which population viability is a concern.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as Amended (16 USC 703-711)

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), as amended, provides legal protection for almost all bird species occurring in, migrating through, or spending a portion of their life cycle in North America by restricting the killing, taking, collecting, and selling or purchasing of native bird species or their parts, nests, or eggs. Certain game bird species are allowed to be hunted for specific periods determined by Federal and State governments. The intent of the MBTA is to eliminate any commercial market for migratory birds, feathers, or bird parts, especially for eagles and other birds of prey.

Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, as Amended (16 USC 668-668c)

The Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) of 1940, as amended, provides legal protection to bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) and golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) in addition to protection afforded under the MBTA. The BGEPA prohibits the "take" (to pursue, shoot, shoot at, wound, kill, capture, trap, collect, molest, or disturb) of bald and golden eagles including their nests, eggs, or parts. "Disturbance" of bald and golden eagles is also prohibited under the BGEPA, and "disturbance" relates to injuries to bald or golden eagles or a disruption to life cycles, productivity, and/or substantial interference of normal bald and golden eagle behavior.

State

California Endangered Species Act (California Fish and Wildlife Code Sections 2050-2116)

The CESA parallels the Federal ESA. CESA prohibits the "take" of State-listed species unless an incidental take permit is granted. Under CDFW Code Section 2081 (Incidental Take Permit), CDFW can authorize the "take" of a listed species (with exception to fully protected species) if the "take" of the listed species is incidental to carrying out an otherwise lawful project. Section 2080.1 provides an alternative to the Section 2081 permit process by allowing for "take" once an applicant obtains a Federal Incidental Take Permit which can be approved (Consistency Determination letter) within 30 days by the CDFW Director. If the Federal Incidental Take Statement is determined not to be consistent with CESA, then application for a State Incidental Take Permit (2081) is required.

State Fully Protected Species

The State of California designated species as FP prior to the creation of CESA and ESA. Lists of FP species were initially developed to provide protection to species that were rare or faced possible extinction/extirpation. Most FP species have since been state listed as threatened or endangered species. Under California Fish and Wildlife Code Section 4700, fully protected species may not be taken or possessed at any time.

In September 2011, the California Legislature sent the Governor legislation authorizing CDFW to permit the incidental take of 36 fully protected species pursuant to an NCCP approved by CDFW (Senate Bill 618 [Wolk]). The legislation gives FP species the same level of protection as provided under the NCCP Act for endangered and threatened species (Fish and Wildlife Code Section 2835). The NCCP Act, enacted in the 1990s, authorizes the incidental take of species "whose conservation and management" is provided for in a conservation plan approved by CDFW.

Sections 1600-1602 of the California Fish and Wildlife Code

Pursuant to Division 2, Chapter 6, Sections 1600-1602 of the Fish and Wildlife Code, CDFW regulates all diversions, obstructions, or changes to the natural flow or bed, channel, or bank of any river, stream, or lake, which supports fish or wildlife. CDFW defines a "stream" (including creeks and rivers) as "a body of water that flows at least periodically or intermittently through a bed or channel having banks and supports fish or other aquatic life. This includes watercourses having surface or subsurface flow that supports or has supported riparian vegetation." CDFW's definition of "lake" includes "natural lakes or man-made reservoirs." CDFW limits of jurisdiction include the maximum extents of the uppermost bank-to-bank distance or riparian vegetation dripline. CDFW jurisdiction within altered or artificial waterways is based upon the value of those waterways to fish and wildlife.

California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code, Sections 21000-21177)

CEQA requires that State and Local agencies consider environmental consequences and project alternatives before a decision is made to implement a project requiring State or Local government approval, financing, or participation by the State of California. In addition, CEQA

requires the identification of ways to avoid or reduce environmental degradation or prevent environmental damage by requiring implementation of feasible alternatives or mitigation measures.

California Native Plant Protection Act

The Native Plant Protection Act of 1977 directed CDFW to "preserve, protect and enhance rare and endangered plants in this State." CDFW "requires a CESA Section 2081 (a) permit for take of candidate or listed threatened and endangered plants for scientific, educational, or management purposes, and a CESA Section 2081 (b) permit for incidental take of listed threatened and endangered plants from all activities, except those specifically authorized by the NPPA." The CNPS Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California was referenced in the literature review of the Proposed Project.

Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act of 1966 (California Water Code Sections 13000-13999.10)

This act mandates that activities that may affect waters of the State shall be regulated to attain the highest quality. The SWRCB and the local RWQCB are the relevant permitting agencies. RWQCB provides regulations for a "non-degradation policy" that are especially protective of waters with high quality. Porter–Cologne reserves the right for the State of California to regulate activities that could affect the quantity and/or quality of surface and/or ground waters, including isolated wetlands, within the State. Waters of the State include isolated waters that are no longer regulated by USACE. If the project is proposed to discharge into waters of the State, a Waste Discharge Report must be filed.

Local

County of San Diego

The *County of San Diego General Plan* provides direction for future growth in the unincorporated areas of San Diego County, and provides policies related to land use, mobility, conservation, housing, safety, and noise. The *County of San Diego General Plan* Land Use Element provides a framework for managing future development in the County so that it is thoughtful of the existing character of the current communities and the sensitive natural resources within the County.

The *County of San Diego General Plan* contains the following policies:

> Conservation and Open Space Policy COS-1.2: Minimize Impacts. Prohibit private development within established preserves. Minimize impacts within established preserves when the construction of public infrastructure is unavoidable.
>
> Conservation and Open Space Policy COS-1.3: Management. Monitor, manage, and maintain the regional preserve system facilitating the survival of native species and the preservation of healthy populations of rare, threatened, or endangered species.

Communities of Ramona and Santa Ysabel

The *Ramona Community Plan* (2010) provides guidance for the community of Ramona and the surrounding area. The *Ramona Community Plan* is a portion of the *San Diego County General Plan* that provides goals and policies for the community. The goals and policies were decided based on analysis by the Ramona Community Planning Group.

The *Ramona Community Plan* contains the following policies and goals:

> Conservation and Open Space Policy –COS 1.1.2 Protect raw land from grading or other disturbances prior to approval and permit process.
>
> Conservation and Open Space Policy – COS 1.1.8 Conserve functional wildlife and plant habitats, particularly those supporting rare or endangered species. These areas have been mapped as Resource Conservation Areas (RCA) on the Ramona Resource Conservation Map.
>
> Conservation and Open Space Policy – COS 1.1.9 Encourage the conservation of riparian brush and woodland areas and significant wildlife habitat.
>
> Conservation and Open Space Policy – COS 1.1.11 Require the use of native seed mixes wherever feasible for the revegetation of cleared areas, provided that the use of native brush does not pose a fire hazard.
>
> Conservation and Open Space Policy – COS 1.1.12 Discourage severe grading and encourage the preservation of native brush.

Central Mountain Subregional Plan

The *Central Mountain Subregional Plan* (2011) provides guidance to the communities of Cuyamaca, Descanso, Guatay, Mount Laguna, and Pine Valley, and covers an area of approximately 203,000 acres. The *Central Mountain Subregional Plan* is a portion of the *San Diego County General Plan* that provides goals and policies for that area of the county.

The *Central Mountain Subregional Plan* contains the following relevant goals and policies:

> Conservation Goal 1: The careful management of environmental resources in the plan area that prevents wasteful exploitation or degradation of those resources, and preserves them for future generations.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 2: In chaparral, clearing of brush shall be limited to that required for fire protection.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 4: Cumulative effects of habitat disturbance should be addressed during evaluation of environmental impacts of development projects.

> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 7: For any project requiring environmental review, biological studies will be required that specifically address wildlife movement corridors and areas of wildlife concentration whenever applicable.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 11: Biological studies shall be required for discretionary permits when deemed necessary by County environmental review staff. These studies shall specifically address, but not be limited to, the identification of endangered, threatened, and sensitive species.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 12: Spring surveys shall be required in areas where sensitive species are known to exist.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Policy 13: Require all biological resources to be recorded on a Resources Map and biological reports to be kept for public record and use.

North Mountain Subregional Plan

The *North Mountain Subregional Plan* (2011) provides guidance to the communities of Santa Ysabel, Warner Springs, Palomar Mountain, Mesa Grande, Sunshine Summit, Ranchita, and Oak Grove. As noted in the community plan, a majority of the area is characterized by large areas of open space with some scattered rural residential development. The *North Mountain Subregional Plan* is a portion of the *San Diego County General Plan* that provides goals and policies for the specific communities within the planning area.

The *North Mountain Subregional Plan* contains the following goals and policies:

> Community Character Policy 3: Require development to provide for two replacement trees for each tree removed at appropriate locations elsewhere on the subject property.
>
> Land Use Policy 5: Encourage preservation of areas with rare, unique, or endangered wildlife and plants.
>
> Conservation General Goal: The careful management of the environmental resources in the subregion to prevent wasteful exploitation or degradation of those resources, and to preserve resources for future use.
>
> Vegetation and Wildlife Goal: The preservation of the natural landscape and wildlife habitat within the subregion.

SDG&E Subregional Natural Community Conservation Plan

In December 1995, the USFWS and the CDFW approved the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, developed in coordination with such agencies that addresses potential impacts to species and habitat associated with SDG&E's ongoing installation, use, maintenance, and repair of its gas and electric systems, and typical expansion to those systems throughout much of SDG&E's existing service territory. As a part of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, SDG&E has been issued incidental take permits (Permit PRT-809637) by the USFWS and the CDFW for 110 Covered

Species. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* was developed by following the multiple species and habitat conservation planning approach. Even with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, SDG&E's goal is to avoid "take" of Covered Species whenever possible and to implement measures to avoid and minimize any take to the maximum extent possible. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* includes operational protocols that apply to construction and operations and maintenance activities. In approving the NCCP, USFWS, and CDFW determined that the operational protocols avoid potential impacts and provide appropriate mitigation where such impacts are unavoidable, and ensure the protection and conservation of federal and state listed species and Covered Species. The Proposed Project falls within the area in which SDG&E's utility operations are governed by the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* and the NCCP would be applied to the Proposed Project. As such, the NCCP fully addresses all of the potential construction and operations and maintenance impacts of the Proposed Project on federal and state listed species and Covered Species. The NCCP avoidance and minimization measures and operational protocols have been incorporated as part of the Proposed Project description.

SDG&E is a public utility regulated by the CPUC. As described in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP Implementing Agreement*, local governments are precluded from regulating public utilities through their zoning laws, land use laws, ordinances and other police powers (including other NCCPs or HCPs) by the exclusive jurisdiction of the CPUC. Therefore, as stated in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP Implementing Agreement*, the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* "*is independent of other NCCP/HCPs and the Covered Species for which Incidental Take is authorized under the Take Authorizations is not dependent upon the implementation of such plans.*"

Other Conservation Plans

The Proposed Project traverses through preservation areas, including Mt. Gower Preserve (BLM lands), Simon Preserve (County of San Diego), and through two Multiple Species Conservation Plans (MSCPs), the North County MSCP and the East County MSCP (both the North County and East County MSCP are in Draft form and have not yet been adopted). The majority of the Proposed Project is anticipated to occur within SDG&E's ROW (with the exception of staging yards, temporary anchors, and a few string sites and wooden guard structures), and *SDG&E's Subregional NCCP* applies outside of existing ROW; therefore the Proposed Project does not conflict with other conservation plans or mitigation/preservation areas. SDG&E would coordinate with the appropriate authorities during the Proposed Project approval process to ensure that the impacts, avoidance and minimization measures, and operational protocols are implemented for the Proposed Project under the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*.

North County MSCP

The North County MSCP is located in the northwest portion of San Diego County, encompassing the unincorporated communities of Bonsall, De Luz, Fallbrook, Harmony Grove, Rancho Santa Fe, Lilac, Pala, Pauma Valley, Ramona, Rincon Springs, and Valley Center, among others. The North County MSCP area is governed by the County of San Diego's North County Plan document, a planning document that aims to protect biodiversity and quality of life in the region by "reducing constraints on future development outside of proposed preserve areas and decreasing the costs of compliance with federal and state laws protecting biological resources." In order to maintain biodiversity and ecosystem health, the North County Plan

incorporates goals including biological goals, economic goals, and social goals. The North County Plan underwent a public review in 2009. Comments received during the public review period are now being used to revise the North County Plan.

East County MSCP

The East County MSCP area is located on approximately 1.6 million acres covering the eastern half of the County of San Diego. The East County MSCP area includes the communities of Central Mountain, Cuyamaca, Descanso, Pine Valley, Borrego Springs, Julian, Mountain Empire, Jacumba, Campo, Potrero, and Tecate, among others.

A great deal of collaborative work has gone into development of the East County Plan, including release of a preliminary draft map in 2008. However, County budget constraints and staffing reductions have caused progress of the East County Plan to slow significantly. Once the budget and staffing constraints are resolved, plan development is intended to resume. This document will eventually provide guidelines for the East County MSCP.

Simon Preserve Resource Management Plan

The Simon Preserve is approximately 617 acres in size and is located from approximately 2 miles southeast of the main town center of the unincorporated community of Ramona in the County of San Diego, to approximately 13 miles northeast of the City of Poway. The *Simon Preserve Resource Management Plan* is a document that guides activities within the Simon Preserve in order to protect the biological and cultural resources present in the preserve. The Resource Management Plan not only catalogues the existing habitats, species, and resources within the preserve, it also guides future management of these resources and outlines operations and maintenance requirements for meeting management goals.

South Coast Resource Management Plan

The Mt. Gower Preserve is a 1,574-acre preserve located southeast of the community of Ramona. The *South Coast Resource Management Plan (1994)* is a document that guides the activities on BLM-owned lands for San Diego, Riverside, San Bernardino, Orange, and Los Angeles Counties. The BLM is in the process of revising the *South Coast Draft Resource Management Plan*. This area covers nearly nine million acres, with approximately 300,820 acres of that land being BLM-administered public land. The Mt. Gower Preserve is located within this BLM planning area, and is thus subject to the *South Coast Resource Management Plan.* The preserve features dense chaparral, meadows, oak woodlands, and shaded stream habitats that provide a wide range of habitats for wildlife. The public lands within the Mt. Gower Preserve are under a lease to the San Diego County Parks and Recreation Department. BLM retains ownership of these lands.

4.4.3.2 Biological Resources Setting

The Proposed Project passes through several ecosystems or eco-regions, including foothills and the central valley regions of San Diego County. The Proposed Project Survey Area supports a variety of major vegetation communities in accordance with the categories set forth in Holland

(1986) or Gray and Bramlet (1992) totaling approximately 558.17 acres (this calculation does not include paved roads). General vegetation communities observed during the surveys include Mixed Oak Woodland, Southern Riparian Forest, Oak Savanna, Chaparral, Southern Mixed Chaparral, Mixed Chaparral/Coastal Sage Scrub, Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub, Freshwater Seep/Open Water, Grassland, Pastureland/Cultivated Agriculture, Urban and Developed/Ornamental Landscaping, and Disturbed habitat. Vegetation communities observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area and the plants that typically occur within those communities are described below. Plant species observed during the surveys are included in Appendix 4.4-A (Appendix D, Plant Species Observed List). The total vegetation acreages within the Proposed Project Survey Area are summarized in Table 4.4-1, Vegetation Communities Within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Table 4.4-1: Vegetation Communities Within the Proposed Project Survey Area

Vegetation Communities (with associated NCCP vegetation community classification)	Acreage
Agriculture	7.37
Chaparral	26.05
Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub Buckwheat Scrub Coastal Sage Scrub	37.29
Disturbed Wetland	4.10
Disturbed Bare Ground	30.37
Freshwater Seep/Open Water Freshwater Marsh Meadow/Seep	1.31
Grassland (Includes Non-Native Grassland)	186.51
Mixed Oak Woodland Coast Live Oak Forest Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland	10.98
Oak Savanna Open Oak Woodlands	83.21
Southern Mixed Chaparral	72.77
Southern Mixed Chaparral/Coastal Sage Scrub Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix	15.62
Southern Riparian Forest Riparian Forests	3.74
Urban and Developed/Ornamental Landscaping Landscape/Ornamental	78.86
Grand Total	**558.17**

Vegetation Communities

Forests and Woodlands

Forest and Woodland habitats consist of multilayered vegetation. Forest habitats typically are characterized as having closed, dense tree canopies. Woodland habitats usually have a more open (20 percent) canopy than forest habitats.

Mixed Oak Woodland

Mixed Oak Woodlands are most often found at elevations below 4,000 feet above mean sea level (amsl). This type of community typically varies from pure, closed canopies of more than one oak (*Quercus* sp.) species. The dominant species within the Survey Area include coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*), scrub oak (*Q. berberidifolia*), Engelmann's oak (*Q. engelmannii*), Palmer's oak (*Q. palmeri*), canyon live oak (*Q. chrysolepis*), California black oak (*Q. kelloggii*), interior live oak (*Q. wislizenii* var. *frutescens*), desert scrub oak (*Q. cornelius-mulleri*), and oak hybrids including (*Quercus x acutidens*), and (*Quercus x morehus*). Trees in this community are approximately 10 to 25 meters in height. The herbaceous layer, mainly consisting of nonwoody annual grasses and forbs, can be continuous. Poison oak (*Toxicodendron diversilobum*) also plays a major role in the woody understory or certain Oak Woodlands onsite. Mixed Oak Woodland can be found in canyon bottoms and steep, north-facing slopes with various soil types. This type of community recovers from fires very rapidly. Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodlands and Coast Live Oak Forest are also a component of Mixed Oak Woodland. Approximately 10.98 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following two vegetation communities are NCCP vegetation classifications that are components of Mixed Oak Woodland. Descriptions of these two NCCP vegetation communities are found below.

<u>Coast Live Oak Forest</u>

Areas within and/or surrounded by Coast Live Oak Forest consist of an evergreen woodland community, dominated by coast live oak that may reach a height of 35 to 80 feet. The shrub layer may consist of toyon (*Heteromeles arbutifolia*), Mexican elderberry (*Sambucus mexicana*), fuchsia-flowered gooseberry (*Ribes speciosum*), and poison oak. A dense herbaceous understory generally consists of miner's lettuce (*Claytonia perfoliata* var. *perfoliata*) and chickweed (*Stellaria media*) as potential dominant species. This community occurs along the coastal foothills of the Peninsular Ranges, typically on north-facing slopes and in shaded ravines.

<u>Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodlands</u>

Areas characterized by Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodlands are dominated by Engelmann oak trees and may include other oak species such as coast live oak and black oak and scrub oak (*Q. dumosa*). Trees are widely spaced in open Engelmann oak woodland. The understory is typically grassland or meadow.

Southern Riparian Forest

Southern Riparian Forests are most often found at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. This type of community is dominated by tall, open, broadleaved, winter-deciduous riparian species such as willow (*Salix* spp.), cottonwood (*Populus* spp.), sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), and alder (*Alnus* spp.) species. The understory is usually dominated by shrubby willow species or other riparian shrubs. This community is almost always found along rivers and streams or in areas with a high water table. Dominant species require moist, bare mineral soil for germination and establishment and will typically begin to establish after flood waters recede. Approximately 3.74 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Southern Riparian Forest. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Riparian Forests

Areas characterized as Riparian Forests are identified by the following site conditions: areas occurring along the banks of stream channels and in flood plains dominated by trees such as coast live oak, western sycamore , Fremont's cottonwood (*Populus fremontii*), black willow (*Salix gooddingii*), and arroyo willow (*Salix lasiolepis*). The canopy is dense to open. The understory consists of herbaceous species and shrubs, frequently including Fendler's meadow-rue (*Thalictrum fendleri*), poison oak, skunkbush (*Rhus trilobata*), and spreading snowberry (*Symphoricarpos mollis*).

Oak Savanna

Oak Savannas in San Diego County are most often found at elevations ranging from 200 to 2,300 feet amsl. This type of community consists of annual grasses or perennial needlegrass (*Nassella* spp.) species along with widely scattered oak trees that provide less than 10 to 20 percent of the canopy cover. The dominant oak species in this community, particularly in San Diego County, is mainly coast live oak. The Oak Savanna community usually intergrades with Open Oak Woodlands. Approximately 83.21 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Oak Savanna. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Open Oak Woodlands

Areas characterized as Open Oak Woodlands are made up of a combination of oak tree species that may include Engelmann oak, coast live oak, scrub oak, and black oak trees. Generally, these areas contain oaks that are widely spaced, similar to a savanna habitat. The understory is typically grassland or meadow.

Scrublands and Chaparral

Scrubland and Chaparral are composed of a mix of the two vegetation communities. Scrublands consist of drought-deciduous, low, soft-leaved shrubs and herbs which are often gray-green in

color (e.g., sagebrush, buckwheat, sage). They occupy gentle to steep slopes with shallow or heavy soils mostly at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. Chaparrals consist of evergreen, dark green, leathery-leaved, medium to tall shrubs that are adapted to occasional fires. Specific types of scrublands and chaparrals are discussed in more detail below.

Chaparral

Chaparral communities are most often found at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. This type of community is dominated by leathery-leaved, woody shrubs 1.5 to 3 meters in height, forming a dense vegetation canopy typically dominated by chamise (*Adenostoma fasciculatum*), black sage (*Salvia mellifera*), sugar bush (*Rhus ovata*), California buckwheat, and ceanothus (*Ceanothus* spp.) species. Plants are deeply rooted with little to no understory but have an accumulation of leaf litter. Growth occurs throughout the year, with the highest growth period occurring during the spring. Chaparral is adapted to repeated fires, after which many species respond by stump-sprouting from an underground root burl. Approximately 26.05 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Southern Mixed Chaparral

Southern Mixed Chaparral communities are most often found at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. This type of community is dominated by broad, leathery-leaved, woody shrubs 1.5 to 3 meters in height, forming a dense vegetation canopy typically dominated by scrub oak, chamise, several manzanita (*Arctostaphylos* spp.) and ceanothus species with patches of bare soil. Plants are deeply rooted with little to no understory but have an accumulation of leaf litter. Growth occurs throughout the year, with the highest growth period occurring during the spring. Growth is reduced during the late summer-fall dry season or during winter at higher elevations. Southern Mixed Chaparral is adapted to repeated fires, after which many species respond by stump-sprouting from an underground root burl. This community is typically found on dry, rocky, often steep slopes with little soil. This community can be found adjacent to Chamise Chaparral. Approximately 72.77 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Mixed Chaparral/Coastal Sage Scrub

Mixed Chaparral/Coastal Sage Scrub communities are most often found at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. This type of community represents a gradation and intermingling of coastal sage scrub and chaparral types. These communities represent ecotonal areas between chaparral and scrub communities with component species of both types. Approximately 15.62 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub

Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub communities, as described by Holland, are most often found at elevations below 1,500 feet amsl. This community is the most common form of Coastal Sage Scrub found in San Diego County. This community is made up of low, soft-woody subshrubs up to one meter in height that are most active in winter and early spring. Most species commonly found in the community are drought-deciduous and include species such as California sagebrush, California buckwheat, white sage (*Salvia apiana*), and laurel sumac (*Malosma laurina*). This

community can be found on steep, xeric slopes or clay-rich soils that release stored water slowly. Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub may integrate with Buckwheat Scrub and types of chaparral at higher elevations. Approximately 37.29 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following two vegetation communities are NCCP vegetation classifications that are components of Diegan Coastal Sage Scrub. Descriptions of these two NCCP vegetation communities are found below.

Buckwheat Scrub

Areas within and/or surrounded by Buckwheat Scrub primarily consist of foothill buckwheat (*Eriogonum wrightii* var. *membranaceum*) or white sage, and generally lack the presence of California sagebrush. The inland form of buckwheat scrub may also contain species such as matchweed (*Gutierrezia* spp.) and cheat grass (*Bromus tectorum*).

Coastal Sage Scrub

Areas within and/or surrounded by Coastal Sage Scrub vegetation are primarily dominated by various combinations of California sagebrush, California buckwheat, saw-toothed goldenbush (*Hazardia squarrosa*), laurel sumac, and black sage and to a lesser extent by deerweed (*Lotus scoparius*), wild cucumber (*Marah macrocarpus*), chaparral yucca (*Yucca whipplei*), mission manzanita (*Xylococcus bicolor*), and California aster (*Corethrogyne filaginifolia*).

Grasslands and Meadows

Grasslands and Meadows are composed of the two vegetation communities. Grasslands consist of low, herbaceous vegetation dominated by grasses. These habitats grow in deep, well-developed soils on gentle slopes and flats. Meadow habitats are often referred to as seasonal wetlands that consist of seasonally-flooded or saturated areas dominated by annual and perennial herbs. Approximately 186.51 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Grasslands and Meadows. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Grassland

Grasslands are most often found at elevations below 3,000 feet amsl. This type of community consists of a dense to sparse cover of annual grasses such as oats (*Avena* sp.), bromes (*Bromus* sp.), and ryegrass (*Lolium* sp.) with flowering culms up to 3 feet in height. This community is often associated with numerous species of showy-flowered, native annual forbs, "wildflowers," such as California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), lupines (*Lupinus* sp.), and goldfields (*Lasthenia* sp.), especially in years of favorable rainfall. Germination occurs with the onset of the late fall rains; growth, flowering, and seed-set occur from winter through spring. Typically plants are dead through the summer-fall dry season, persisting as seeds. Grassland can be found on fine-textured, usually clay soils, that are moist or even waterlogged during the winter rainy season and very dry during the summer and fall.

Freshwater Seep/Open Water

Freshwater Seeps in San Diego County are most often found at elevations ranging from 2,000 to 4,000 feet amsl. This type of community is composed mostly of perennial herbs, typically sedges and grasses, often forming complete vegetative cover that grows throughout the year. Soils are permanently moist. Freshwater Seeps were often found on pasturelands on private property within the Survey Area. Freshwater marshes and meadows are also found within this community. Approximately 1.31 acres of this community exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following two vegetation communities are NCCP vegetation classifications that are components of Freshwater Seep/Open Water. Descriptions of these two NCCP vegetation communities are found below.

Meadow/Seep

Areas characterized as Meadow/Seep include vegetation such as annual and perennial herbs, including wildflowers and bulbs such as mariposa lily (*Calochortus* spp.), lupine , bluedicks (*Dichelostemma capitatum*), and many others. Where seeps occur, groundwater keeps the soil moist longer; and vegetation often includes rushes (*Carex* spp.) and spike rushes (*Eleocharis* spp.) and other plants typically associated with wet areas.

Freshwater Marsh

Areas characterized Freshwater Marsh is characterized by soil that is saturated by fresh water. Freshwater Marshes contain vegetation dominated by emergent herbaceous species such as rushes , and spike rushes .

Wetland

Areas characterized as a Wetland generally consist of alkali heath (*Frankenia grandiflora*), arroyo willow , black willow , hardstem bulrush (*Scirpus acutus*), mulefat (*Baccharis salicifolia*), and common cattail (*Typha latifolia*). Approximately 4.10 acres of this community exists within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Wetland communities. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Disturbed Wetland

Disturbed Wetland areas consist of flooded or saturated native wetland sites that have been infiltrated and fractured by non-native exotic species, (e.g., giant reed (*Arundo donax*), oats, bromes, and ryegrass.

Other Areas

Areas that are not considered native, naturally-occurring habitats are categorized as "Other Areas" for their lack of dominant native vegetation or because they have been dramatically disturbed or altered by humans.

Pasturelands/Cultivated Agriculture

This type of community is best characterized as Dryland Field Crops consisting of planted, annual grasses and forbs harvested for livestock feed. These species include barley (*Hordeum* spp.), wild oat (*Avena fatua*), and clover or alfalfa (*Trifolium* spp., *Medicago sativa*) species. Soils are similar to native grasslands, made up of fine-textured, often clay soils that can be very moist in the winter and very dry in the summer. Approximately 7.37 acres of Pasturelands and Cultivated Agriculture exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Pasturelands/Cultivated Agriculture. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Agricultural

Areas characterized as agricultural habitat consist of vegetation that has been disturbed by agricultural management practices, including the removal of native vegetation, planting of crop species, and ground-disturbing activities such as grading and tilling. Agricultural activities range from crop production to livestock production and pasture land. Crops may or may not be present.

Urban and Developed/Ornamental Landscaping

Urban and Developed areas consist of buildings, pavement, and highway ROWs throughout the county. Approximately 78.86 acres of Urban and Developed land or Landscaped land exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following vegetation community is a NCCP vegetation classification that is a component of Urban and Developed/Ornamental Landscaping. The description of the NCCP vegetation community is found below.

Landscape/Ornamental

Project sites characterized as landscape/ornamental vegetation are dominated by non-native species planted for landscaping and generally occur in residential neighborhoods or along roadsides.

Disturbed

Disturbed often barren areas either lack vegetation because of clearing or grading (bare ground) or are dominated by pioneering herbaceous species that readily colonize disturbed ground, such as tocalote (*Centaura melitensis*), wild oat, black mustard (*Brassica nigra*), prickly sow-thistle

(*Sonchus asper*), and wild lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*). Approximately 30.37 acres of this community exists within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

The following two vegetation communities are NCCP vegetation classifications that are components of Disturbed vegetation community. Descriptions of these two NCCP vegetation communities are found below.

Bare Ground

Areas characterized as bare ground habitats include areas with exposed soils, rocky substrate, access roads, and disturbed areas devoid of plant cover.

Disturbed

Areas within and/or surrounded by disturbed areas are primarily dominated by various combinations of ripgut brome (*Bromus diandrus*), red brome (*Bromus madritensis* ssp. *rubens*), prickly Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), slender wild oat , tocalote , redstem stork's bill (*Erodium cicutarium*), lambsquarters (*Chenopodium album*), and hairy crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*) with scattered individuals or remnants of coastal sage scrub including California buckwheat, California sagebrush, and deerweed.

Critical Habitat

USFWS designates critical habitat for endangered and threatened species under the federal ESA (16 USC Section 1533 (a)(3). Critical habitat is designated for the survival and recovery of federally listed endangered and/or threatened species. Protected habitat includes areas for foraging, breeding, roosting, shelter, and movement of migration.

The USFWS critical habitat areas for listed species were searched using GIS shapefiles provided by USFWS within three miles of the Proposed Project alignment. Three USFWS designated critical habitat areas were identified: CAGN (within the Proposed Project ROW), and Arroyo toad (*Anaxyrus californicus*) and San Diego fairy shrimp (*Branchinecta sandiegonensis*) (outside of Proposed Project ROW). Although maps depict CAGN critical habitat, the USFWS designation of critical habitat for the CAGN specifically excluded areas within functioning HCPs, such as the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, and the area within the Proposed Project ROW was excluded from the Critical Habitat designation in narrative form in the Final Rule. Therefore, the Proposed Project ROW area does not constitute Critical Habitat. Designated critical habitat areas for arroyo toad exist within one to three miles outside the Proposed Project ROW in several locations. Critical habitat for the San Diego fairy shrimp exists outside the Proposed Project ROW just north of Ramona High School, approximately 1-mile west of the Proposed Project ROW.

Special Status Plants

The CNDDB, CNPS' Electronic Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California, *SDG&E Subregional NCCP species*, and BLM database search resulted in a list of 83 special status plant species that have been known to occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Project

area. Sixteen species derived from the CNDDB and CNPS' Electronic Inventory of Rare and Endangered Vascular Plants of California have the potential to occur within three miles of the Proposed Project. Portions of the Proposed Project area exist within BLM lands under jurisdiction of BLM. Approximately 10 poles (Pole Nos. R66 to P68 and P75 to P81) located in the central area of the Proposed Project fall within BLM lands referred to as the Mt. Gower Preserve. Out of the 83 species, 67 species were derived from the BLM database search and were identified as having a potential to occur within the Proposed Project area on BLM Lands.

Out of the 83 species, 77 species are considered absent from the Proposed Project based on the lack of suitable habitat and the results of the focused survey efforts. Appendix 4.4-A (Appendix B, CNDDB Sensitive Plant Species Occurrence Table) provides a list of all these species, as well as their status and potential to occur in the Proposed Project area.

Five species, San Diego milk-vetch (*Astragalus oocarpus*), Orcutt's brodiaea (*Brodiaea orcuttii*), delicate clarkia (*Clarkia delicate*), San Bernardino aster (*Symphyotrichum defoliatum*), and Parry's tetracoccus (*Tetracoccus dioicus*), have been determined to be present within the Proposed Project Survey Area. One species, San Diego gumplant (*Grindelia hallii*) is considered to have a moderate potential to occur within the Proposed Project alignment. Descriptions of the sensitive plant species and general areas identified during the focused plant surveys are found in the Appendix 4.4-A (Section 5.3).

San Diego Milk-Vetch County Rare Plant Register (CRPR) List 1B.2, BLMS

San Diego milk-vetch is a perennial herb in the Fabaceae family that flowers between May and August. This species often grows in the openings among chaparral and cismontane woodland. San Diego milk-vetch can be found at elevations between 1,000 and 5,000 feet (304 to 1,524 meter) amsl. San Diego milk-vetch is considered a sensitive species by BLM.

A total of 83 individuals were observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole No. R107 during protocol-level focused plant surveys conducted during the 2010 blooming period.

Orcutt's Brodiaea CRPR List 1B.1, BLMS, NCCP-Covered

Orcutt's brodiaea is a perennial, bulbiferous herb in the Themidaceae family that flowers between May and July. This species often grows in the openings of chaparral, cismontane woodland, coastal scrub, playas, and valley and foothill grassland. This species favors a variety of soil types including; clay, mesic, and sometimes serpentine soils. Orcutt's brodiaea can be found at elevations between 100 and 5,550 feet (30 to 1,676 meter) amsl. It can hybridize with the state and federal listed endangered thread-leaved brodiaea (*Brodiaea filifolia*). Orcutt's brodiaea is considered a sensitive species by the BLM.

A total of 1,020 individuals were observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole Nos. D26 and D28 during protocol-level focused plant surveys conducted during the 2010 blooming period.

Delicate Clarkia CRPR List 1B.2

Delicate clarkia is an annual herb in the Onagraceae family that flowers between April and June. This species often grows in gabbroic soils in chaparral and cismontane woodland. Delicate clarkia can be found at elevations between 770 and 3,280 feet (234 to 999 meters) amsl.

A total of 2,830 individuals were observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole Nos. P90, P108, R174, and P91 during protocol-level focused plant surveys conducted during the 2010 blooming period.

San Bernardino Aster CRPR 1B.2, BLMS

San Bernardino aster is a perennial, rhizomatous herb in the Asteraceae family that flowers between July and November. This species often grows in a variety of habitats, typically in vernally mesic soils in cismontane woodland, coastal scrub, lower montane coniferous forest, meadows and seeps, marshes and swamps, valley and foothill grassland, and near ditches, streams, and springs. This plant can be found at elevations between 6 and 6,700 feet (0 to 2,042 meters) amsl. San Bernardino aster is considered a sensitive species by the BLM.

A total of 100 individuals were observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole No. P106 during protocol-level focused plant surveys conducted during the 2010 blooming period.

Parry's Tetracoccus CRPR 1B.2, BLMS, NCCP-Covered

Parry's tetracoccus is a perennial deciduous shrub in the Euphorbiaceae family that flowers between April and May. This species often grows in chaparral and coastal scrub. Parry's tetracoccus can be found at elevations between 540 and 3,280 feet (164 to 999 meters) amsl. Parry's tetracoccus is considered a sensitive species by BLM.

A total of 181 individuals were observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole Nos. D46, P50, and P48 during protocol-level focused plant surveys conducted during the 2010 blooming period.

Special Status Wildlife

The CNDDB, *SDG&E Subregional NCCP Covered Species*, and BLM database searches resulted in a list of 56 special status wildlife species that have been known to occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Project. Based on the habitat assessments by qualified and permitted biologists, focused surveys were conducted for QCB and CAGN. Only CAGN, a NCCP-covered species, were identified during the focused survey efforts. No QCB were detected or observed within the Survey Areas.

Approximately 10 poles (Pole Nos. R66 to P68, P75 to P81) are located in the central area of the Proposed Project and fall within BLM lands referred to as the Mt. Gower Preserve. Three species of bats are BLM Sensitive species only, and are considered to have a low potential to occur on BLM Lands within the Proposed Project alignment. A comprehensive list and details

of these species can be found in the Appendix 4.4-A (Appendix C, CNDDB Sensitive Wildlife Species Occurrence Table).

Based on the database review and field surveys conducted in 2010, 2011 and 2012, 41 of the 56 special status wildlife species were determined to have a low potential to occur or to be absent from the Proposed Project Survey Area. Of the 56 species, seven are federally listed as endangered (of the seven, two are also state listed as endangered), one federally listed as threatened, two fully protected, and one listed as a federal candidate species. Of the seven listed species, only CAGN (federally threatened [FT]/SSC) were observed. Two fully protected species, golden eagle (NCCP-covered) and white-tailed kite (*Elanus leucurus*) (not NCCP-covered) were observed or have a high potential to forage on the site, but are considered absent or have a low potential to nest on the Proposed Project ROW, respectively.

The following seven species have been determined to have a moderate to high potential to occur within the Proposed Project Survey Area. Although these species have a moderate to high potential to occur within the Proposed Project, these species were not observed during the survey efforts.

- Northern Red-Diamond Rattlesnake (*Crotalus ruber ruber*) SSC, NCCP-Covered
- San Diego Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus similis*) USFS Sensitive, NCCP-Covered
- San Diego Desert Woodrat (*Neotoma lepida intermedia*) SSC, NCCP-Covered
- American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*) SSC, NCCP-Covered
- Belding's Orange-Throated Whiptail (*Aspidoscelis hyperythra beldingi*) SSC, NCCP-Covered
- Dulzura (California) Pocket Mouse (*Chaetodipus californicus femoralis*) SSC, NCCP-Covered
- Golden Eagle FPS Under BGEPA, CDFW Watch List, BLMS, NCCP-Covered

The following eight species were observed during surveys and are considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Coast (San Diego) Horned Lizard (Phrynosoma coronatum blainvillii) SSC, BLM and USFS Sensitive, NCCP-Covered

The coast horned lizard is a California SSC, BLM and USFS Sensitive, and is covered under the NCCP. It is found in a wide variety of habitats, including coastal sage scrub, annual grasslands, chaparral, oak woodlands, riparian woodlands, and coniferous forests. It is perhaps most abundant in riparian and coastal sage scrub habitats on old alluvial fans of the southern California coastal plain. In foothill and mountain habitats that are covered with dense brush or other vegetation, the species is largely restricted to areas with pockets of open microhabitat; this habitat structure can be created by natural events such as fire and floods or human-created disturbances such as livestock grazing, fire breaks, and road construction. The key elements of

these microhabitats are loose, fine, sandy soils; an abundance of native ants; open areas for basking; and low but relatively dense shrubs for refuge.

The coast horned lizard can be considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project. CNDDB lists six records of occurrence for this species within three miles of the Proposed Project, the Survey Area contains good quality habitat, and this species was observed on the Proposed Project near Pole No. P116.

Coronado Island Skink (Plestiodon [Eumeces] skiltonianus interparietalis) SSC, BLMS, NCCP-Covered

The Coronado Island skink is a California SSC, considered sensitive by the BLM, and is covered under the NCCP. It occurs in a variety of plant associations ranging from coastal sage, chaparral, oak woodlands, pinyon-juniper, and riparian woodlands to pine forests; but within these associations it prefers early successional stages and is often restricted to areas with adequate rocky cover, usually near streams. This species is diurnal, with most activity occurring in early spring to early fall, with bimodal activity in summer. The Coronado Island skink has four white or beige stripes on a brown dorsum. The intervening mid-dorsal and lateral dark stripes extend to or beyond the middle of the tail in adults. The tail has at least some blue coloration; the tail color is often brilliant blue in juveniles and adults having unbroken tails. Coronado Island skinks feed upon small invertebrates found in leaf litter.

The Coronado Island skink can be considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project Survey Area. CNDDB lists a record of occurrence within 1 mile of the Survey Area, and this species was observed on the Proposed Project near Pole No. R107. In addition, the Survey Area contains good quality suitable habitat to support this species.

Coastal Rosy Boa (Lichanura trivirgata roseofusca) USFS Sensitive, NCCP-Covered

The rosy boa is a USFS Sensitive Species and is covered under the NCCP. The rosy boa is considered a sensitive species by both BLM and USFS. The coastal rosy boa is associated with rocky coastal sage, inland sage, and chaparral-covered hillsides and canyons from the coast to the desert transition zone. It may be found under rocks, in rock crevices, or in boulder piles. It also is an excellent climber that willingly moves through vegetation and branches in search of prey. It preys upon small mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and birds and kills though constriction. Associated vegetation types include coastal sage scrub dominated by California sagebrush and buckwheat, chamise chaparral, and ceanothus/manzanita chaparral. It often is attracted to oases, intermittent streams, and other sources of water but does not require it. It is chiefly nocturnal but also is regularly seen during the day. Several historical locations known for this species occur in the vicinity of the Proposed Project; and suitable habitat for this species occurs along most of the coastal slope portion of the Survey Area.

This species is considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project Survey Area. CNDDB lists two records of occurrence within 3 miles of the Proposed Project and the Survey Area contains good quality suitable habitat to support this species. In addition, this species was observed on the Proposed Project area near Pole Nos. P51 and P116. However, this species is not a state sensitive species (not a designated SSC or listed species). The two poles located within

Cleveland National Forest Lands, where this species was observed, are Pole Nos. P115 and P116. However, no ground disturbing activities would occur during construction, as these two poles have already been replaced with steel poles and only pole top work will occur during the Proposed Project at these locations.

Cooper's Hawk (Accipiter cooperii) SSC, NCCP-Covered

The Cooper's hawk (nesting) is a California SSC and is covered under the NCCP. Recently, the Cooper's hawk has been known to breed in suburban and urban areas with similar tree structure to native habitats. This species is similar in appearance to the sharp-shinned hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), but is distinguished by its larger size, more rounded tail, and darker crown. The Cooper's hawk is a medium-sized (14 to 20 inches) hawk and is well-adapted for hunting birds as prey with its long tail and short, rounded wings; these features allow maneuverability in pursuit and on the ambush. In addition to birds, it may also take amphibians, reptiles and small mammals as supplemental prey items.

The Cooper's hawk can be considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project Survey Area for foraging purposes and has a HIGH potential to nest. Although CNDDB lists no records of occurrence within 3 miles of the Survey Area, the Proposed Project area contains good quality suitable habitat and this species was observed near Pole No. P156.

Southern California Rufous-Crowned Sparrow (Aimophila ruficeps canescens) Watch List (WL), NCCP-Covered

The southern California rufous-crowned sparrow is a California Watch List (WL) species and is covered under the NCCP. It is one of 17 recognized subspecies of the rufous–crowned sparrow, whose overall range includes parts of California, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas as well as Mexico. Habitats include broken sage scrub and chaparral, native grasslands with sparse shrubs, and rocky, brush laden hillsides and canyons with open patches. It is a small, non-descript sparrow with a rusty crown, white eye-ring, dark whisker marks, and a flat-headed appearance. It is a secretive species that is more often heard than seen as it forages among the shrubs.

The southern California rufous-crowned sparrow can be considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project area for foraging, with a HIGH potential to nest. CNDDB lists three records of occurrence within three miles of the Survey Area. This species was observed foraging in several locations along the Proposed Project Survey Area which contains good quality suitable habitat.

Purple Martin (Progne subis) SSC

The purple martin (nesting) is a California SSC and is not covered under the NCCP. It winters mostly in South America to southeastern Brazil. Habitats include towns and farms in open or semi-open country near water. This species prefers to nest in man-made martin houses but will also nest in tree cavities and saguaro cactus. It tends to fly in circles while foraging for insects over water bodies but occasionally gleans insects from the ground. With a wingspan of up to 17 inches, the purple martin is the largest North American swallow. The male is uniformly blue-black above and below; it is the only American swallow with a dark belly. The female is light-

bellied, with a grayish throat and breast and often a faint collar. A major cause for the decline of this species is competition from European starlings and house sparrows; these birds are very aggressive cavity nesters that effectively out-compete purple martins for nest sites. Other factors include the felling of dead trees with nesting cavities.

The purple martin can be considered PRESENT on the Proposed Project area for both foraging and nesting purposes. CNDDB lists a record of this species in 2007, nesting in a wood power pole east of Little Page Road and 0.5 mile south of Hwy 78, at Collier Flat. In addition, a purple martin pair was observed nesting at Pole No. P113.

White-Tailed Kite FPS, BLMS

The white-tailed kite (nesting) is a California FPS, is considered sensitive by the BLM, and is not covered under the NCCP. In the United States, its range extends along the Pacific coast from southwest Washington through California and also includes south-central Arizona, south Texas, and south Florida. It also occurs in Mexico and Central America. In California, it is a resident and localized migrant of the Central Valley and Pacific coast. Evidence in recent years suggests that the range of this species is increasing, although erratic shifts in the distribution of this species are not uncommon. It inhabits low- to moderate-elevation grasslands, savannas, agricultural areas, wetlands, oak woodlands, marshes, and riparian woodlands and usually breeds in open areas with scattered trees, often near water. The white-tailed kite is a medium-sized hawk with a white head; grey back; long, white tail; and large, black scapulars. It forages often by "kiting," or hovering in one area while scanning the ground for potential prey. Its diet includes primarily small mammals, but it will also take large insects, amphibians, and lizards. Degradation or loss of grassland habitat to development or ranching is a significant threat to populations. Historical population declines may be attributed to chemical poisoning.

The white-tailed kite can be considered PRESENT within the Proposed Project Survey Area for foraging purposes and has a LOW potential to nest. The CNDDB lists one record of occurrence within 1 mile of the Proposed Project Survey Area, and this species was observed on the Proposed Project Survey Area near Pole No. P158.

Coastal California Gnatcatcher FT, SSC, NCCP-Covered

The CAGN is federally listed as a threatened species, is a California SSC, and is covered under the NCCP. The historical range of this species extended from the coast and foothills of Ventura County and south through Los Angeles, southwestern San Bernardino, western Riverside, Orange, and San Diego counties of California into northwestern Baja California, Mexico. Populations have since become increasingly fragmented. It is a permanent resident of Diegan, Riversidian, and Venturan sage scrub sub-associations found from sea level to 2,500 feet in elevation. CAGN is a small, secretive songbird with grayish coloration and faint, white, outer tail margins. Males of this species exhibit a black cap during the breeding season. This insectivorous bird nests and forages in moderately dense stands along gentle slopes, arid hillsides, mesas, foothills, and alluvial washes. It gleans a variety of insects within its territory, including caterpillars and other larval insects. It builds a cup nest in suitably dense shrubs and lays four eggs, on average. Contributing factors in the decline of this species include overly frequent fire cycles, non-native plant invasions, brown-headed cowbird nest parasitism, predation, and widespread habitat loss to

urbanization and agriculture. Chambers Group conducted focused surveys for this species in 2010. Comprehensive results of these surveys were presented in the *Coastal California Gnatcatcher Focused Survey Report for the San Diego Gas & Electric Company Cleveland National Forest Master Services Permit Project San Diego County, California* prepared by Chambers Group.

CAGN can be considered PRESENT on the Proposed Project for both foraging and nesting purposes. The USFWS designation of critical habitat for the CAGN specifically excluded areas within functioning HCPs, such as SDG&E's *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. Habitat for the CAGN is found in several locations along the Proposed Project area This species was observed nesting and foraging on the Proposed Project area near Pole No. P64 west to Pole No. P52, Pole No. P48 to Pole No. P51, Pole No. D44 to Pole No. P43 to Pole No. P47, and Pole No. D46 during focused surveys conducted in 2010 (Appendix 4.4-A, Section 5.4).

Special Mention Species

Golden Eagle FPS Under BGEPA and CDFW, CDFW WL, BLMS, NCCP-Covered

The golden eagle is a federally protected species under the BGEPA and by the State of California, is a CDFW WL species, and is considered sensitive by the BLM. This species is covered under the NCCP. This species is found mostly in western North America, from Alaska south to central Mexico. Fewer are found in eastern Canada, as well as a few isolated pairs in the eastern United States. The golden eagle prefers mountainous or hilly terrain, hunting over open country for small mammals, snakes, birds, or carrion. The golden eagle nests on cliff faces, walled canyons, or in tall trees. The golden eagle is a very large raptor, standing nearly three feet tall, with a large, hooked bill. It is brown all over, with a golden sheen on its head and golden patches and highlights over its life molt. Direct or indirect human activities (e.g., collisions with vehicles and structures; electrocution; gunshot; and poisoning) have been estimated to cause up to 70 percent of recorded golden eagle deaths. Populations are also threatened by habitat degradation and nest disturbance. Although data regarding golden eagles was obtained from SDG&E from a golden eagle nest survey conducted for the Sunrise Powerlink Project in 2010, this data was not publicly published in an effort to protect the location of the nest sites.

The golden eagle has a HIGH potential to forage within the Proposed Project area and can be considered ABSENT for nesting within the Proposed Project Survey Area. Although CNDDB lists no records of occurrence within three miles of the survey area, a historic golden eagle nesting location was identified within five miles southeast of the Proposed Project, an area known as the Gower Mountain site in the Cleveland National Forest. Wildlife Research Institute conducted golden eagle surveys and provided SDG&E with raw data to create the 4,000 foot exclusionary buffers. According to the Raptor Management page on the USDA Forest Service website, this nest was not active in 2012. Therefore, this species is considered to have a high potential to forage but nesting areas are considered absent directly within the Proposed Project Survey Area.

Quino Checkerspot Butterfly federally endangered (FE), NCCP-Covered

The QCB is a federally listed endangered subspecies of *Euphydryas editha* and is covered under SDG&E's low-effect HCP. The species ranges from northern Baja California to Canada along the Pacific coast and east to Colorado. The historical range of this subspecies once included the coastal plains and inland valleys of southern California and northern Baja California. It formerly occurred at many sites in San Diego, Orange, Los Angeles, and western Riverside counties. It is associated with habitats that contain its primary larval host plant, western plantain (*Plantago erecta*) and other host plants such as bird's beak (*Cordylanthus rigidus*) and owl's clover (*Castilleja exserta*). Specifically, owl's clover serves as an additional larval host plant for some Quino checkerspot colonies located east of Temecula. These host plants tend to occur in clay or cryptogamic soils in areas mostly devoid of tall, weedy growth and/or a dense cover of shrubs. Adult butterflies characteristically tend to patrol low hilltops, rocky outcrops, and ridges. Additional habitat requirements include the presence of adult nectar sources and topographic features that include bare, open soils and ridgetops. Habitat loss and invasive plant species are contributing factors in the continuing decline of this species. Chambers Group conducted focused surveys for this species in 2010. Suitable habitat was identified during the habitat assessment by a permitted biologist; therefore focused surveys were conducted in areas containing suitable habitat for QCB within the Proposed Project Survey Area. No QCB were identified. Comprehensive results of these surveys were presented in the *Quino Checkerspot Butterfly 45-Day Focused Survey Report for the San Diego Gas & Electric Cleveland National Forest Project, San Diego County, California*.

The QCB can be considered ABSENT from the Proposed Project Survey Area. Although the Proposed Project Survey Area has suitable habitat, CNDDB lists no records of occurrence within three miles of the Proposed Project. Protocol focused surveys within the Proposed Project Survey Area were conducted by USFWS permitted QCB biologist Greg Chapman (TE-075112-1). No QCB were identified during the protocol surveys.

Jurisdictional Delineation of Waters and Wetlands

Four watersheds exist within the Proposed Project Survey Area: the Santa Maria, San Vicente, San Diego River, and Santa Ysabel watersheds (refer to Appendix 4.4-A, Section 5.10). The Santa Maria watershed is located at the western end of the Proposed Project in the unincorporated community of Ramona. The San Vicente watershed begins at the origin of San Vicente Creek east of Littlepage Road and spans the survey area to Simon Preserve in the unincorporated community of Ramona. The San Diego River watershed originates at the San Diego River located in the unincorporated community of Santa Ysabel and is fed by rainwater and snowmelt from Volcan Mountain. The Santa Ysabel watershed originates in Volcan Mountain in the unincorporated community of Santa Ysabel and is fed by rainwater and snowmelt from Volcan Mountain.

Santa Maria Creek, San Vicente Creek, the San Diego River, and Santa Ysabel Creek are RPWs leading to several reservoirs. Santa Maria Creek does not flow directly within the Proposed Project but is fed by several ephemeral drainages that direct surface water only immediately after rain events. San Vicente Creek originates within the Proposed Project; however, perennial flow

does not establish until after the inflow from Dye Creek, which is outside the Proposed Project Survey Area. The San Diego River does not flow directly within the Proposed Project but is fed by several ephemeral drainages and Dye Creek.

Sixty-seven drainages or features, potentially subject to USACE, CDFW, and RWQCB jurisdiction are located within the Proposed Project area, however, all but 17 have been avoided. Eleven poles, (Pole Nos. P148, P149, P150, P103, P104, P105, P106, R107, P114, P152 and P129) are located within wet meadows that have been determined to be jurisdictional by the USACE and RWQCB. Six poles (Pole Nos. R10, R169, R171, D167, R11 and R13) are located within an unvegetated streambed/waters of the U.S. (adjacent to Creelman Road) that has been determined to be jurisdictional by CDFW, USACE and the RWQCB.

4.4.4 Potential Impacts

The following discussion describes the potential impacts to sensitive species and habitat that may occur as a result of construction and operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project. As part of the Proposed Project description, SDG&E would be operating under its own NCCP, which was established according to the Federal ESA and California ESA and the state's NCCP Act. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* contains operational protocols designed to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive species and their habitats. Adherence to the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* will protect and conserve listed and covered species and habitats and ensure that potential impacts remain less than significant. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* is described more fully in Section 3, Project Description. In order to preserve consistency with the operation protocols within the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, permanent and temporary impacts to biological resources that result directly from construction activities (such as impacts to sensitive habitats) are discussed within the Construction impacts section.

4.4.4.1 Significance Criteria

Potential impacts to biological resources are separated into those likely to occur from construction (both short and long term impacts) and those that could occur as a result of operation and maintenance.

Thresholds of impact significance were derived from Appendix G of the *CEQA Guidelines*. Under these guidelines, the Proposed Project could have a potentially significant impact to biological resources if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS;
- Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the CWA (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;

- Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites;
- Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or
- Conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or state HCP.

4.4.4.2 Question 4a - Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS?

Construction – Less than Significant

Overview

The following discussion describes the Proposed Project's potential to impact sensitive resources during construction. SDG&E would operate in compliance with all state and federal laws, regulations, and permit conditions. This includes compliance with the CWA, Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act, ESA, MBTA, BGEPA, CESA, CEQA, requirements and protective measures from BLM (when working on BLM land), CDFW, USFWS, and requirements and protective measures from Cleveland National Forest (when working on Cleveland National Forest land). In addition, SDG&E would operate under the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, which was established according to the ESA and CESA and the NCCP Act. This would include compliance with Section 7.1, *Operational Protocols* and Section 7.2, *Habitat Enhancement Measures* of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. The *Operational Protocols* avoid and minimize impacts to all sensitive resources, regardless of whether the species is a NCCP-covered species. No additional APMs are recommended at this time. All associated impacts to biological resources for the Proposed Project are considered less than significant with adherence to prior approvals, existing laws and regulations, and SDG&E standard practices.

Impacts to sensitive species, including NCCP-covered species, and their habitats could result from the Proposed Project. Construction of the Proposed Project could result in temporary disturbance and/or permanent loss of sensitive vegetation communities, native trees, disturbed wetlands and jurisdictional waters due to construction activities including: pole removal, pole installation, anchor removal, temporary workspaces, access to poles (including foot paths), and the use of staging yards, stringing sites, and guard structures. SDG&E would avoid and minimize any impacts according to the NCCP and the *Operational Protocols*, and 401 Certification (RWQCB Certification No. 11C-114; Categorical Exemption; refer to Appendix 4.4-A, Appendix F, Water Permits) conditions. With the implementation of the *SDG&E NCCP Operational Protocols* and prior approvals, impacts are expected to remain less than significant. In addition, it is important to note that TL 637 is an existing power line with existing facilities (i.e. poles), and that all old facilities will be completely removed where feasible when they are replaced with new facilities as a part of the Proposed Project. The permanent impacts calculated for the installation of new facilities for the Proposed Project do not take into account the removal

of the old facilities and the permanent impacts associated with the original installation of those facilities, therefore the impacts presented in this report are conservative.

Impacts to Vegetation Communities

Consistent with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive habitat areas when possible, including not placing poles in drainage areas, using existing access roads to the greatest extent possible, and placing any new facilities, staging areas, or access roads outside habitats when feasible. Where avoidance of sensitive habitat areas is not possible, or where sensitive habitat areas exist adjacent to the Proposed Project work areas, implementation of the measures in Section 7.1 and 7.2 of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure these impacts remain less than significant. Total temporary impacts to sensitive vegetation communities and non-sensitive vegetation communities (Disturbed, Agriculture, Bareground, and Landscape/Ornamental communities) identified within the Proposed Project are summarized in Table 4.4-2, Anticipated Impact Summary Table.

Table 4.4-2: Anticipated Impact Summary Table

Type of Impact		Area Impacted (square feet/acres)
Temporary	Total Anticipated Temporary Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities (not including Disturbed, Agriculture, Bareground, and Landscape/Ornamental communities)	572,099 SF / 13.13 ac
	Total Anticipated Temporary Impacts to Non-Sensitive Vegetation Communities (Disturbed, Agriculture, Bareground, and Landscape/Ornamental communities)	491,321 SF / 11.28 ac
	Total Anticipated Temporary impacts	**1,018,420 SF / 23.38 ac**
Permanent[1]	Total Anticipated Permanent Impacts to Sensitive Vegetation Communities (not including Disturbed, Agriculture, Bareground, and Landscape/Ornamental communities)	1,520 SF / 0.03 ac
	Total Anticipated Permanent Impacts to Non-Sensitive Vegetation Communities (Disturbed, Agriculture, Bareground, and Landscape/Ornamental communities)	2,306 SF / 0.05 ac
	Total Anticipated Permanent Impacts	**3,826 SF / 0.08 ac**

Notes:
[1]Permanent impacts to vegetation communities are discussed as construction impacts to be consistent with the structure and implementation of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*.

The Proposed Project would permanently impact approximately 0.001 acre of Open Oak Woodland, 0.005 acre of Chaparral, 0.005 acre of Buckwheat Scrub, 0.010 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, 0.012 acre of Grassland, 0.001 acre of Landscape/Ornamental, 0.011 acre of Disturbed, 0.041 acre of Bareground, and 0.002 acre of Disturbed Wetland habitats. No permanent impacts to Riparian Forest, Agricultural, Coastal Sage Scrub, Freshwater Marsh, Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland, or Coast Live Oak Forest habitat would occur.

The Proposed Project would also temporarily impact approximately 0.063 acre of Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland, 0.044 acre of Open Oak Woodland, 0.003 acre of Coast Live Oak Forest, 0.366 acre of Chaparral, 0.132 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub, 0.953 acre of Buckwheat Scrub, 0.486 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, 0.002 acre of Meadow/Seep, 10.052 acres of Grassland, 0.118 acre of Landscape/Ornamental, 5.029 acres of Agriculture, 2.652 acres of Disturbed, 3.351 acres of Bareground, and 0.128 acre of Disturbed Wetland habitats. No temporary impacts to freshwater marsh or riparian forest habitat would occur.

Anticipated permanent and temporary impacts associated with the Proposed Project were documented during a pre-activity survey conducted July 11 through 15, 2011. Vegetation communities were documented at each proposed facility impact area and noted in the PSR habitat/ land use and mitigation table. Vegetation communities were also further identified during a 2010 focused plant survey conducted by Chambers Group botanists. Many of the vegetation communities from the PSR and the 2010 plant survey overlap. As noted during the focused plant survey in 2010, rare and listed species were identified, mapped, and marked with waypoints on handheld GPS units. Any sensitive plant species identified was included in the final rare plant report. Rare plants identified on the ROW during the plant survey were also noted in the PSR studies. Total anticipated temporary and permanent impacts to vegetation communities are summarized in Table 4.4-3, Anticipated Impacts by Vegetation Community Type.

Table 4.4-3: Anticipated Impacts by Vegetation Community Type

Vegetation Community	Temporary		Permanent[1]	
	Acres	Square Feet	Acres	Square Feet
Agricultural	5.029	219,073	0	0
Buckwheat Scrub	0.953	41,550	0.005	205
Chaparral	0.366	15,951	0.005	230
Bare Ground	3.351	145,972	0.041	1,797
Coastal Sage Scrub	0.132	5,762	0	10
Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix	0.486	21,182	0.010	435
Disturbed	2.652	115,543	0.011	465
Disturbed Wetland	0.128	5,575	0.002	98
Freshwater Marsh	0	0	0	0
Meadow/Seep	0.002	88	0	0
Grassland	10.052	437,844	0.012	503
Landscape/Ornamental	0.118	5,158	0.001	44
Open Oak Woodland	0.044	1,931	0.001	39
Riparian Forest	0	0	0	0
Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland	0.063	2,768	0	0
Coast Live Oak Forest	0.003	111	0	0

Notes:

[1]Permanent impacts to vegetation communities are discussed as construction impacts to be consistent with the structure and implementation of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*.

Impacts to Preserve Areas

The term "Preserve" means the area encompassed by the MSCP's Multi-Habitat Planning Area (MHPA) map (as currently defined or ultimately adopted), the equivalent maps for the MSCP programs in San Diego County, the South Orange County NCCP Subregional Plan reserve area, and the Riverside County Conservation Agency Core reserve areas. If no preserve areas are formally delineated, those areas which are designated moderate, high, and very high quality habitat are considered a "Preserve." Habitat quality is based on species composition and connectivity with the surrounding natural vegetation communities. SDG&E proposes to withdraw credit from the SDG&E mitigation bank for 412 square feet (square feet) of permanent impacts to sensitive vegetation communities located within Preserve areas at a ratio of 2:1 for a total of 824 square feet, and for a total of 23,313 square feet of temporary impacts to sensitive vegetation communities located within Preserve areas at a ratio of 1:1 as a result of project-related activities. Therefore, SDG&E proposes to draw down a total of 24,137 square feet (0.55 acre) of credit from the SDG&E mitigation bank for impacts to sensitive habitat types located within Preserve areas. Total anticipated temporary and permanent impacts to sensitive vegetation communities are summarized in Table 4.4-4, Anticipated Impacts Summary Table for Preserve Areas.

Table 4.4-4: Anticipated Mitigation Summary Table for Preserve Areas

Type of Mitigation		Area (square feet)
Temporary	Total Anticipated Credit Withdrawal for Temporary Impacts to Buckwheat Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, Chaparral, Dense Engelmann Oak Woodlands, Grassland, Meadow Seep, Open Engelmann Oak Woodland, and Open Oak Woodland habitats Within a Preserve at a 1:1 Ratio	23,313
Permanent[1]	Total Anticipated Credit Withdrawal for Permanent Impacts to Buckwheat Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, Chaparral, Grassland, and Meadow Seep Habitats Within a Preserve at a 2:1 Ratio	824
TOTAL	Total Anticipated Credit Withdrawal for Impacts to Buckwheat Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, Chaparral, Dense Engelmann Oak Woodlands, Grassland, Meadow Seep, Open Engelmann Oak Woodland, and Open Oak Woodland habitats Within Preserve Areas	24,137
Enhancement	Total Anticipated Enhancement (Active Enhancement) for Temporary Impacts to Buckwheat Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, and Open Engelmann Oak Woodland Habitats Within a Preserve at a 1:1 Ratio	6,600
Monitoring	Total Anticipated Enhancement (Monitoring) for Temporary Impacts to Grassland Habitats Within a Preserve at a 1:1 Ratio	53,000
ENHANCEMENT & MONITORING TOTAL	Total Anticipated Enhancement (Active Enhancement & Monitoring) for Impacts to Buckwheat Scrub, Coastal Sage Scrub, and Open Engelmann Oak Woodland Habitats Habitat Within Preserve Areas	59,600

Notes:

[1]Permanent impacts to vegetation communities are discussed as construction impacts to be consistent with the structure and implementation of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*.

SDG&E proposes to include 59,600 square feet of anticipated temporary impacts to sensitive habitats located within Preserve areas in the SDG&E Enhancement and Monitoring Program. The Enhancement and Monitoring Program consists of two components: the active enhancement of areas containing sensitive vegetation located within Preserve areas that are temporarily impacted by project-related activities, and the monitoring of areas containing sensitive vegetation located within Preserve areas that are temporarily impacted by project-related activities which are expected to recover on their own. Six thousand and six hundred square feet of the above mentioned temporary impacts will be mitigated through active site enhancement. Fifty-three thousand square feet of the above mentioned temporary impacts will be monitored to determine if natural recovery eliminates the need for further mitigation. Habitat that is expected to recover on its own consists of grassland, in which the majority of species are non-native in origin. Because SDG&E does not actively enhance non-native vegetation, and because this habitat type is generally considered resilient enough to completely regenerate to pre-activity levels without active enhancement measures, these areas will be monitored in order to determine whether or not they meet success criteria. Success criteria as defined by Section 7.2 of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*:

> *Monitoring, involving visual inspection shall be conducted on restoration sites after one year. Coverage standards will be based on established stands of the target vegetation or another reference area. The means of determining success criteria should be based on estimates of cover by native species. The cover of the native species should increase and the cover of weed species should decrease, eventually approximating the reference area. The reference areas should be a nearby stand of vegetation that the restoration is attempting to emulate. It should have a similar aspect, slope, and soil type. Cover for the restoration and reference areas should be estimated using repeatable cover classes.*

If success criteria for both enhancement and monitoring areas are not met after three years, SDG&E proposes to withdraw the appropriate amount of credit for these areas from the SDG&E mitigation bank at a 1:1 ratio.

Work crews must follow all *SDG&E Subregional NCCP Operational Protocols* to avoid and minimize impacts to resources as a result of project-related activities within the Proposed Project area. Impacts associated with the operations and maintenance of existing facilities are addressed for the term of the NCCP by SDG&E's agreement to restrict development other than SDG&E's activities on fee-owned ROWs which contain habitat, connect fragmented habitat areas, or contribute to the carrying capacities of the Preserve areas in the region. SDG&E agrees to limit its use of such ROWs to utility activities. Therefore, mitigation for operations and maintenance of existing facilities located outside the Preserve is not required.

In addition, it is important to note that TL 637 is an existing power line with existing facilities (i.e. poles), and that all old facilities will be completely removed where feasible when they are replaced with new facilities as a part of the Proposed Project. The permanent impacts calculated for the installation of new facilities for the Proposed Project do not take into account the removal of the old facilities and the permanent impacts associated with the original installation of those facilities; therefore the impacts presented in this report are conservative. It is expected that the majority of habitat impacted previously by the original facilities will return to its natural state on

its own, or will be restored to its natural state through the site enhancement required for new impacts from the Proposed Project.

Impacts to Sensitive Plant Species

Construction activities could potentially impact sensitive plant species. Five sensitive plant species — San Diego milk-vetch, Orcutt's brodiaea, delicate clarkia, San Bernardino aster, and Parry's tetracoccus,— are known to be present within the Proposed Project Survey Area, based on the 2010 rare plant surveys. However, these species were not identified within the construction impact area, and were flagged for avoidance during pre-activity surveys conducted between July 11 through 15, 2011. SDG&E would utilize the *SDG&E NCCP Operational Protocols*, to avoid and minimize any impacts to these species. Implementation of these *Operational Protocols* would ensure the potential impacts to delicate clarkia and San Bernardino aster remain less than significant.

No other sensitive plant species were found during the 2010 rare plant surveys. One additional sensitive plant species, San Diego gumplant, was determined to have a moderate potential to occur within the Proposed Project area due to having suitable habitat present within the Survey Area and historical occurrences recorded within three miles of the ROW; however, the species was not specifically surveyed for during the 2010 rare plant surveys. SDG&E will survey for this species during the Proposed Project-wide verification survey prior to construction activities to avoid potential impacts to this species. Seventy-seven out of a total of 83 sensitive species were determined to be absent or have a low potential to occur within the Proposed Project area. None of these species were detected during the rare plant survey; therefore, no impacts to these species are expected to occur.

In addition, per the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, verification surveys are required if surface disturbance has not commenced within 30 days of the submittal of the PSR to the USFWS and the CDFW. If any additional sensitive plant species are found, compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure impacts remain less than significant.

Impacts to Sensitive Wildlife Species

A total of 56 sensitive wildlife species have a potential to occur on the Proposed Project. The potential presence of sensitive wildlife species is based on known recorded occurrences within the region and appropriate habitat present within the Proposed Project area. Seven species have a moderate to high potential to occur, and eight are considered present within the Proposed Project. SDG&E would utilize and implement the *SDG&E NCCP Operational Protocols* to avoid and minimize any impacts to these species. Implementation of these Operational Protocols would ensure the potential impacts to the eight species with a moderate to high potential to occur (northern red-diamond rattlesnake, San Diego ringneck snake, Belding's orange-throated whiptail, golden eagle, Dulzura pocket mouse, San Diego desert woodrat, and American badger) and the eight species that are considered present (coast horned lizard, Coronado Island skink, coastal rosy boa, coastal California gnatcatcher, purple martin, white-tailed kite, Cooper's hawk, and rufous-crowned sparrow) within the Proposed Project remain less than significant.

In addition, per the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, verification surveys are required if surface disturbance has not commenced within 30 days of the submittal of the PSR to the USFWS and the CDFW. If any additional sensitive wildlife species are found, compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure impacts remain less than significant. A discussion of these species is provided below.

Impacts to Sensitive Reptile Species

Construction activities could potentially impact six sensitive reptile species. Three of the sensitive reptile species (coast horned lizard, Coronado Island skink, coastal rosy boa) are NCCP-covered species and were present in the Proposed Project area. One species (Belding's orange-throated whiptail, NCCP-covered) has a high potential to occur, and the remaining two species (northern red-diamond rattlesnake, San Diego ringneck snake – both NCCP-Covered) have a moderate potential to occur in the Proposed Project area.

SDG&E will implement all relevant *Operational Protocols* from the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. The *Operational Protocols* are designed to avoid and minimize impacts to all sensitive resources. These protocols include, but are not limited to, restricting vehicles to existing roads when feasible, avoiding wildlife to the extent practicable, conducting preconstruction surveys, and handling of wildlife only by biologists or experts in handling wildlife. This includes a biological monitor onsite to avoid and minimize impacts to biological resources. Implementation of SDG&E's Operational Protocols and *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* guidelines would ensure potential impacts to sensitive reptile species remain less than significant.

In addition, per the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, verification surveys are required if surface disturbance has not commenced within 30 days of the submittal of the PSR to the USFWS and the CDFW. If any additional sensitive reptile species are found, compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure impacts remain less than significant.

Impacts to Sensitive Avian Species

Proposed construction activities may cause both permanent and temporary impacts to foraging and/or nesting habitat for six sensitive avian species that have either been observed within the Proposed Project Survey Area or have a moderate or high potential to occur. Two of these species have been observed foraging and nesting onsite: CAGN (NCCP-covered) and purple martin. Three of these species have been observed foraging within the Survey Area and have a potential for nesting: white-tailed kite, Cooper's hawk (NCCP-covered), and rufous-crowned sparrow (NCCP-covered). The Cooper's hawk and rufous-crowned sparrow have a high potential to nest on the Proposed Project. Low quality suitable nesting habitat for the white-tailed kite near the Proposed Project exists; therefore the potential for this species to nest within the Proposed Project area is low. One of these species, the golden eagle (NCCP-covered), has a high potential to forage onsite but can be considered absent for nesting due to the lack of suitable nesting habitat within the Proposed Project area. In addition, impacts to nesting habitat may affect nesting passerine and raptor species covered under the MBTA.

Proposed Project activities that could result in the permanent or temporary impacts due to loss of nesting and foraging habitat include the removal of wood poles (which support cavity nesters and

raptors depending on the design of cross-arms) and the removal of vegetation, such as during the creation of staging and laydown yards for the construction, stringing sites, wooden guard structures, and installation of new poles. Temporary impacts to avian nesting and foraging may include a temporary increase in noise from construction equipment and vehicles.

Specific temporary and permanent impacts for CAGN were also assessed for locations where CAGN were identified. This species was observed nesting and foraging near Poles Nos. P64 west to P52, P48 to P51, D44 to P43 to P47, and D46 during focused surveys conducted in 2010. Based on the observed locations of this species in suitable habitat (Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix in the immediate area), approximately 122 square feet (0.0028 acre) of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix is anticipated to be permanently impacted due to the Proposed Project. Approximately 759 square feet (0.0493 acre) of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix and 425 square feet (0.0097 acre) of Buckwheat Scrub in the immediate area are anticipated to be temporarily impacted due to the Proposed Project.

The sensitive avian species listed above that have a potential to nest and/or forage within the Proposed Project are covered by the NCCP except for the purple martin and the white-tailed kite. In order to avoid and minimize impacts to sensitive and native avian species, SDG&E will implement all relevant *Operational Protocols* from the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. The *Operational Protocols* are designed to avoid and minimize impacts to all sensitive resources. These protocols include, but are not limited to, restricting vehicles to existing roads when feasible, avoiding wildlife to the extent practicable, and conducting pre-activity surveys. SDG&E would also comply with the MBTA. In order to avoid and minimize impacts to nesting raptors, large, existing stick nests that could support nesting raptors near Pole Nos. P90, P95, R107, P129, P156, and P158 would be monitored for nesting raptors during the raptor breeding season (January 1 through July 31). Implementation of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* and Operational Protocols, and compliance with the MBTA would ensure the impacts to nesting avian species remain less than significant.

Concerns regarding potential electrocution of wildlife species from power lines are primarily focused on avian species. Because the Proposed Project will replace existing electric facilities, this electrocution risk is part of the existing baseline. Electrocution of avian species can occur from wing contact with two conductors, as avian species perching, landing, or taking off from a utility pole can complete the electrical circuit. Avian electrocutions can also occur through simultaneous contact with energized phase conductors and other equipment or simultaneous contact with an energized wire and a grounded wire. Electrocution of avian species poses a greater potential hazard to larger birds, such as raptors, because their body sizes and wing spans are large enough to bridge the distance between the conductor wires and, thus, complete the electrical circuit. The new power line structures would be constructed in compliance with the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee's Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines, in addition to SDG&E's current construction standards, which include increased phase spacing and cover-ups to reduce avian mortality from electrocution. Therefore, the potential for wildlife electrocution would be reduced as a result of the Proposed Project.

In addition, per the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, verification surveys are required if surface disturbance has not commenced within 30 days of the submittal of the PSR to the USFWS and

the CDFW. If any additional sensitive avian species are found, compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure impacts remain less than significant.

Impacts to Sensitive Mammal Species

Proposed construction activities may cause both permanent and temporary impacts to three sensitive mammal species that have a moderate or high potential to occur within the Proposed Project area. These three sensitive mammal species are NCCP-covered species and include two rodent species: Dulzura (California) pocket mouse and San Diego desert woodrat; and one weasel species: American badger. All three species have a moderate potential to occur within the Proposed Project area.

Proposed construction activities, including removing and installing power poles and clearing vegetation during creation of work areas, stringing sites, staging and laydown areas, and guard structures may cause both permanent and temporary impacts to these mammal species. Permanent impacts from these activities may include a reduction of foraging, burrowing, and nesting (woodrat) habitat from vegetation removal. Temporary impacts may result from construction noise and ground vibration, as mammals may be deterred from inhabiting or foraging in areas near such activities.

The NCCP covers all three sensitive mammals described above. Additionally, SDG&E will implement all relevant *Operational Protocols* from the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. The *Operational Protocols* are designed to avoid and minimize impacts to all sensitive resources. These protocols include, but are not limited to, restricting vehicles to existing roads when feasible, avoiding wildlife to the extent practicable, conducting pre-construction surveys, and handling of wildlife only by biologists or experts in handling wildlife. These protocols also include a biological monitor onsite to avoid and minimize impacts to biological resources. Implementation of SDG&E's Operational Protocols and *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* guidelines would ensure potential impacts to sensitive mammal species remain less than significant.

Power lines and other project-related structures provide potential perching opportunities for raptor species, which can increase the potential for predation of wildlife, including sensitive mammal species, by raptors. Because the Proposed Project involves the replacement of existing facilities, elimination of poles, and does not include an extension of the TL, the extent of predation on sensitive and common wildlife species would be reduced as a result of the Proposed Project.

In addition, per the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, verification surveys are required if surface disturbance has not commenced within 30 days of the submittal of the PSR to the USFWS and the CDFW. If any additional sensitive mammal species are found, compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure that impacts remain less than significant.

Avoidance and Minimization of Impacts to Biological Resources

The Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive habitat areas that may support special status species and sensitive biological resources when possible, including not placing poles in drainage areas, using existing access roads to the greatest extent possible, and placing staging

areas, laydown areas, guard structures, and helicopter landing areas outside habitats when feasible. Due to the small permanent footprint of the Proposed Project, and the presence of potential foraging adjacent to the Proposed Project, wildlife habitat is not expected to be adversely affected. Where avoidance of sensitive habitat areas supporting special status wildlife is not possible, or where sensitive habitat areas exist adjacent to Proposed Project work areas, implementation of the measures in Section 7.1 and 7.2 of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure these impacts remain less than significant. Compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP,* which includes avoidance and minimization measures and enhancement for loss of habitat within Preserve areas, would ensure impacts to NCCP Covered Species remain less than significant. Additionally, required pre-activity surveys, pursuant to the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP,* would also confirm the absence of any other special status species not covered under the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. If any non-Covered Species special status species are identified during the surveys, compliance with Sections 7.1 and 7.2 of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would provide avoidance and minimization of impacts, as applicable. The presence or potential presence of a non-Covered Species is expected to be limited to the purple martin (present) and the white-tailed kite (present). The avoidance of any impacts to these species is expected through compliance measures in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*.

SDG&E Operational Protocols (Incorporated Into Proposed Project Design)

SDG&E has a long history of implementing the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* and related operational protocols for projects such as the Proposed Project. Operational protocols represent an environmentally sensitive approach to traditional utility construction, maintenance and repair activities recognizing that slight adjustments in construction techniques can yield major benefits for the environment. The appropriate Operational Protocols for each individual project would be determined and documented by the Environmental Surveyor, which in the context of a wood to steel replacement project would be the lead natural resources representative from SDG&E in conjunction with the lead biological resources monitor from the private biological consulting firm contracted for the job.

Typical Operational Protocols for a wood to steel replacement project include, but are not limited to, the following; a PSR for all impacts occurring in natural areas, biological monitoring of all activities occurring in natural areas, flagging of sensitive habitat for avoidance by the biological monitor, and the review and approval of the biological monitor for all activities occurring in sensitive areas where disturbance to habitat may be unavoidable. In addition, per the *SDG&E NCCP Implementing Agreement*, SDG&E is required to prepare and submit an annual report to the CDFW and the USFWS describing the amount and type of habitats impacted and the activities causing these impacts. In order to meet this requirement, SDG&E's biological consultant will prepare a PCR detailing the actual impacts caused by the Proposed Project. This report will be used to determine the appropriate habitat enhancement and credit drawdown from the SDG&E mitigation bank after the Proposed Project has been constructed.

Operations & Maintenance – No Impact

SDG&E currently maintains and operates existing electric power, distribution and substation facilities throughout the Proposed Project site, and the Proposed Project is the reconstruction of existing electric facilities within existing SDG&E ROW and substation property. SDG&E's

existing facilities and operations and maintenance activities are included in the baseline for evaluating the impacts of the Proposed Project. Operations and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project would decrease slightly compared to baseline conditions due to the increased reliability of the new power line components included in a typical wood to steel replacement project, the installation of fewer poles along the alignment, and the relocation of poles outside of jurisdictional features. Any future potential maintenance-related construction projects would be evaluated under G.O. 131-D and CEQA for purposes of assessing whether further CPUC approval is required and would be conducted in compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

4.4.4.3 Question 4b - Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, regulations, or by the CDFW or USFWS?

Construction – Less than Significant

Proposed construction activities could result in temporary and permanent impacts to sensitive natural communities. Impacts could result from pole removal, installation, staging yards, stringing sites, laydown areas, helicopter landing zones, footpaths, and guard structures. No new access roads are proposed. The *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* allows for impacts to sensitive habitats when incidental to otherwise lawful activities and when conducted in full compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. Compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* is designed to avoid impacts whenever possible and to implement protection measures to avoid and minimize take to the maximum extent possible. Therefore, implementation of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure potential impacts remain less than significant.

The Proposed Project would permanently impact approximately 0.001 acre of Open Oak Woodland, 0.005 acre of Chaparral, 0.005 acre of Buckwheat Scrub, 0.010 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, 0.012 acre of Grassland (including Non-native Grassland), and 0.002 acre of Disturbed Wetland habitats. No permanent impacts to Riparian Forest, Agricultural, Coastal Sage Scrub, Freshwater Marsh, Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland, or Coast Live Oak Forest habitat would occur.

The Proposed Project would also temporarily impact approximately 0.063 acre of Open/Dense Engelmann Oak Woodland, 0.044 acre of Open Oak Woodland, 0.003 acre of Coast Live Oak Forest, 0.366 acre of Chaparral, 0.132 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub, 0.953 acre of Buckwheat Scrub, 0.486 acre of Coastal Sage Scrub/Chaparral Mix, 0.002 acre of Meadow/Seep, 10.052 acres of Grassland (including Non-native Grassland), and 0.128 acre of Disturbed Wetland habitats. No temporary impacts to freshwater marsh or riparian forest habitat would occur.

Consistent with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive habitat areas when possible, including not placing new poles in drainage areas, using existing access roads where feasible, and placing any new facilities, staging areas, stringing sites, guard structures, and helicopter landing zones outside sensitive habitats when feasible. Where avoidance of sensitive habitat areas is not possible, or where sensitive habitat areas exist adjacent to the Proposed Project work areas, implementation of the measures in

Section 7.1 and 7.2 of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would ensure these impacts remain less than significant (refer to Table 4.4-4, Mitigation Summary Table in section 4.4.4.2).

SDG&E proposes to withdraw credit from the SDG&E mitigation bank for 412 square feet of permanent impacts to sensitive vegetation communities located within Preserve areas at a ratio of 2:1 for a total of 824 square feet, and for a total of 23,313 square feet of temporary impacts to sensitive vegetation communities located within Preserve areas at a ratio of 1:1 as a result of project-related activities. Therefore, SDG&E proposes to draw down a total of 24,137 square feet (0.55 acre) of credit from the SDG&E mitigation bank for impacts to sensitive habitat types located within Preserve areas. Total anticipated temporary and permanent impacts to vegetation communities are summarized in Table 4.4-4, Anticipated Impacts Summary Table for Preserve Areas.

SDG&E proposes to include 59,600 square feet of anticipated temporary impacts to sensitive habitats located within Preserve areas in the SDG&E Enhancement and Monitoring Program. Six thousand and six hundred square feet of the above mentioned temporary impacts will be actively restored through active site enhancement. Fifty-three thousand square feet of the above mentioned temporary impacts will be passively restored through monitoring of impacted habitat that is expected to recover on its own. Habitat that is expected to recover on its own consists of grassland, in which the majority of species are non-native in origin. Because SDG&E does not actively enhance non-native vegetation, and because this habitat type is generally considered resilient enough to completely regenerate to pre-activity levels without active enhancement measures, these areas will be monitored in order to determine whether or not they meet success criteria.

As a result of implementation of the above measures, potential impacts from construction would be less than significant. In addition, it is important to note that TL 637 is an existing power line with existing facilities (i.e. poles), and that all old facilities will be completely removed where feasible when they are replaced with new facilities as a part of the Proposed Project. The permanent impacts calculated for the installation of new facilities for the Proposed Project do not take into account the removal of the old facilities and the permanent impacts associated with the original installation of those facilities, therefore the impacts presented in this report are conservative.

Operations & Maintenance – No Impact

SDG&E currently maintains and operates existing electric power, distribution and substation facilities throughout the Proposed Project site, and the Proposed Project is the reconstruction of existing electric facilities within existing SDG&E ROW and substation property. SDG&E's existing facilities and operations and maintenance activities are included in the baseline for evaluating the impacts of the Proposed Project. Operations and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project would decrease slightly compared to baseline conditions due to the increased reliability of the new power line components included in a typical wood to steel replacement project, the installation of fewer poles along the alignment, and the relocation of poles outside of jurisdictional features Any future potential maintenance-related construction projects would be evaluated under G.O. 131-D and CEQA for purposes of assessing whether further CPUC

approval is required and would be conducted in compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

4.4.4.4 Question 4c - Have a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the CWA (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?

Construction – Less than Significant Impact

To minimize impacts to aquatic resources, the Proposed Project has been designed to relocate poles outside of jurisdictional areas whenever possible. However, being part of an existing TL limits placement of the new poles due to consistency in alignment. Several existing poles within TL 637 are proposed to be relocated outside of a jurisdictional area including Poles Nos. P104, P105, P106, P114, and P129. Existing Pole No. R107 is in a disturbed wet meadow and has been proposed to be eliminated from the line.

Permanent Impacts

Replacement of existing Poles Nos. P103, P148, P149, and P150 with new steel poles would occur within disturbed wetland areas (wet meadow). Access to the poles would occur off adjacent dirt roads. A total of 98-square feet (0.002 acre) of permanent impacts to disturbed wetlands is anticipated for these poles.

Temporary Impacts

Temporary impacts associated with the pole removal and replacement activities include access to the poles and workspace around the poles. The replacement of poles and removal of pole butts will occur within the same workspace. As mentioned, temporary impacts associated with pole butt removals are anticipated. However, as stated in the avoidance and minimization measures provided in the RWQCB certification application, if it is determined in the field that pole butt removal activities will cause a significant impact to a drainage feature, the poles will be cut and left in place. Steel plates and a temporary bridge are anticipated to be used to span over approximately three jurisdictional areas to provide temporary access during construction.

Permitting

USACE and RWQCB – Project activities in drainage and wetland feature areas will be carried out under non-notifying Nationwide Permit #12 issued by USACE, and a 401 Certification from RWQCB (Certification 11C-114; Categorical Exemption). Permanent impacts to USACE wetlands associated with pole removal and replacement are 98-square feet. Temporary impacts to USACE jurisdictional wetlands are 0.13 acre, and the temporary impacts to streambed are 0.04 acre. Compensatory mitigation was not required.

The San Diego RWQCB determined that the Proposed Project is categorically exempt from CEQA pursuant to *CEQA Guidelines* Section 15301(b). The exemption applies to repair and maintenance of existing utility structures. Specifically the replacement of the existing wood

poles constitutes maintenance of existing facilities to provide electric power as identified in Section 15301(b).

CDFW – The temporary impacts (0.04 acre) associated with the removal of six poles within CDFW jurisdiction will not substantially adversely affect an existing fish or wildlife resource; therefore, a Streambed Alteration Agreement notification was not submitted.

Consistent with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive habitat areas when possible, including not placing poles in drainage areas, using existing access roads, and placing any new facilities, staging areas, stringing sites, guard structures, and helicopter landing zones outside sensitive habitats when feasible. Through compliance with avoidance and minimization measures included in the RWQCB 401 certification application and compliance with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, direct and indirect impacts to wetlands and other jurisdictional waters would be less than significant.

Operations & Maintenance – No Impact

SDG&E currently maintains and operates existing electric power, distribution and substation facilities throughout the Proposed Project site, and the Proposed Project is the reconstruction of existing electric facilities within existing SDG&E ROW and substation property. SDG&E's existing facilities and operations and maintenance activities are included in the baseline for evaluating the impacts of the Proposed Project. Operations and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project would decrease slightly compared to baseline conditions due to the increased reliability of the new power line components included in a typical wood to steel replacement project, the installation of fewer poles along the alignment, and the relocation of poles outside of jurisdictional features Any future potential maintenance-related construction projects would be evaluated under G.O. 131-D and CEQA for purposes of assessing whether further CPUC approval is required. If necessary, SDG&E will obtain any agency permits required to conduct maintenance activities that would impact wetland resources. Several existing poles within the Proposed Project area are proposed to be relocated outside of a wetland area. In addition, existing Pole No. P103 is located within a wet meadow and the proposed new pole location will be within a wet meadow, but will be relocated immediately adjacent to an existing dirt access road that will minimize wetland impacts during future maintenance activity. Operation and maintenance for these poles would then be conducted outside of a wetland area, reducing future potential impacts to wetland resources. Therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

4.4.4.5 Question 4d - Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of native wildlife nursery sites?

Construction – Less than Significant Impact

It is not anticipated that construction of the Proposed Project would have a significant effect on wildlife movement corridors. The new pole installations would be located within an existing ROW where power lines are already present, and pole replacements are primarily adjacent to existing poles site locations. The Proposed Project will require use of 22 stringing sites and 10 wooden guard structures that will temporarily impact potential foraging habitat. In addition, the

Proposed Project will require use of four staging yards at the Warnock, Creelman, Woodlot, and Santa Ysabel sites and two helicopter landing zones at the Littlepage and Mount Gower sites. Consistent with the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, the Proposed Project has been designed to avoid sensitive habitat areas when possible, including not placing poles in drainage areas, using existing access roads to the greatest extent possible, and placing any new facilities and staging areas outside habitats when feasible.

The majority of the Proposed Project is located within urban, developed, grazing pastures, non-native grasslands, and hillsides. Several drainage features are adjacent to the proposed construction area that could potentially be used as a migration corridor for mammal species; therefore, the quality of the adjacent drainages as a wildlife movement corridor for terrestrial species is diminished on a temporary basis during construction for these areas. However, the proposed construction activities would not significantly impact or restrict general wildlife movement due to the temporary and intermittent locations of construction activities. Although some wildlife may be temporarily displaced during construction, wildlife would not be physically prevented from moving around project equipment in the Proposed Project corridor. The protective measures outlined in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* and the measures in Sections 4.4.4.2 and 4.4.4.3 would avoid and minimize any impacts associated with construction. Therefore, the potential impacts to wildlife movement are anticipated to be less than significant.

Operations & Maintenance – No Impact

SDG&E currently maintains and operates existing electric power, distribution and substation facilities throughout the Proposed Project site, and the Proposed Project is the reconstruction of existing electric facilities within existing SDG&E ROW and substation property. SDG&E's existing facilities and operations and maintenance activities are included in the baseline for evaluating the impacts of the Proposed Project. Operations and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project would decrease slightly compared to baseline conditions due to the increased reliability of the new power line components included in a typical wood to steel replacement project, the installation of fewer poles along the alignment, and the relocation of poles outside of jurisdictional features. Because the Proposed Project involves the replacement of existing facilities and does not include an extension of the tie line, the extent of obstruction or reduction of wildlife corridors is not anticipated to differ from existing conditions. Any future potential maintenance-related construction projects would be evaluated under G.O. 131-D and CEQA for purposes of assessing whether further CPUC approval is required and would comply with the NCCP. Therefore, no impacts to wildlife movement corridors are anticipated during operation and maintenance activities.

4.4.4.6 Question 4e - Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?

Construction – No Impact

SDG&E is a public utility regulated by the CPUC. As described in the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP Implementing Agreement*, local governments are pre-empted from regulating public utilities through their zoning laws, land use laws, ordinances, and other police powers (including other NCCPs or HCPs) by the exclusive jurisdiction of CPUC. To the extent issuance of a tree removal permit or other approval by a local jurisdiction is a discretionary action; CPUC approval

of the PTC would pre-empt local authority. Because these local policies or ordinances do not apply, there would be no impact.

Operations & Maintenance – No Impact

As noted above, local discretionary policies and ordinances do not apply to the Proposed Project. In addition, SDG&E currently maintains and operates existing electric power, distribution and substation facilities throughout the Proposed Project site, and the Proposed Project is the reconstruction of existing electric facilities within existing SDG&E ROW and substation property. SDG&E's existing facilities and operations and maintenance activities are included in the baseline for evaluating the impacts of the Proposed Project. Operations and maintenance activities for the Proposed Project would decrease slightly compared to baseline conditions due to the increased reliability of the new power line components included in a typical wood to steel replacement project, the installation of fewer poles along the alignment, and the relocation of poles outside of jurisdictional features. Any future potential maintenance-related construction projects would be evaluated under G.O. 131-D and CEQA for purposes of assessing whether further CPUC approval is required. Standard operational and maintenance activities (such as road repairs, tree trimming, structure inspections, and repairs) would not conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan. Therefore there is no impact as a result of operation and maintenance of the Proposed Project.

4.4.4.7 Question 4f - Conflict with the provisions of an adopted HCP, NCCP, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?

Construction – No Impact

The Proposed Project traverses through areas within the San Diego East County MSCP NCCP/HCP, and the San Diego North County MSCP NCCP/HCP (line of separation at Poles Nos. P82, and P83). Neither of these NCCP/HCPs has been adopted, therefore there is no conflict. Nonetheless, the Proposed Project would occur within and follow the requirements of the *SDG&E Subregional NCCP*, established according to the Federal and State ESA and the State's NCCP Act. In the event of a conflict, *SDG&E Subregional NCCP* would supersede other applicable plans, including the San Diego County MSCP. As a result, the proposed pole replacement would not conflict with the provisions of any HCPs; and no impacts are anticipated.

Operations & Maintenance– No Impact

As noted above, neither the San Diego North County MSCP NCCP/HCP nor the East County MSCP NCCP/HCP has been adopted. SDG&E operates under its own NCCP, established according to the Federal and State ESAs and the State's NCCP Act. In the event of a conflict, *SDG&E's Subregional NCCP* would supersede other applicable plans, including the San Diego County MSCP. As a result, the proposed pole replacement would not conflict with the provisions of any HCPs; therefore, no impacts are anticipated.

4.4.5 Project Design Features and Ordinary Construction/Operating Restrictions

With implementation of the project design features and ordinary construction/operating restrictions (as outlined within Section 3.8) potential impacts relating to biological resources will remain less than significant. Construction of the Proposed Project would also be completed in compliance with the 401 Certification from RWQCB (Certification 11C-114; Categorical Exemption).

4.4.6 Applicant Proposed Measures

The Proposed Project has no potentially significant impacts relating to biological resources; therefore, no APMs are proposed.

4.4.7 Detailed Discussion of Significant Impacts

Based on the preceding analysis, no significant impacts relating to biological resources are anticipated from the Proposed Project.

4.4.8 References

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