U.S.D.I. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
EA Number CA-066-06-13

DATE: **December 13, 2005**

TITLE / PROJECT TYPE: 2800 Right-of-Way Grant Amendment

CASE FILE / PROJECT No.: CACA-46419

BLM OFFICE: Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
690 W. Garnet Avenue, P.O. Box 1260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260

APPLICANT / PROPONENT: Verizon California Inc.

LOCATION OF PROPOSED ACTION: T. 4S., R.7E., Section 26

USGS TOPOGRAPHIC MAP: **Berdoo Canyon** (Exhibit A)

LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE and Other Regulatory Compliance:

The proposed action and alternatives are in conformance with the following approved land use plan as required by 43 CFR 1610.5: California Desert Conservation Area Plan (1980 as amended), Multiple-use Class ”L“(Limited Use)Energy Production and Utility Corridors Element. In accordance with the plan, communication sites may be allowed in class “L” areas after National Environmental Policy Act of 1976 requirements are met.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The applicant, Verizon California, Inc. has submitted an application to amend their right-of-way grant # CACA-46419 to allow for the construction of two underground power lines and a 8’x10’concrete pad for the placement of a equipment cabinet, located within the existing Verizon site located at the Indio Hills communication facility, for the purpose of providing additional service the present Indio Hills communications site grant holders. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) authorized the installation, operation and maintenance of their existing communications site on September 24, 2004, to serve the communication needs within the Indio Hills communications site.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION and ALTERNATIVES

A. Proposed Action

The proposed action is to amend the plan of development to allow for the placement of two underground power lines, one measuring 55'in length and the other measuring 80' with a concrete pad measuring 10'x 8'for the placement of an outside equipment cabinet that would, when completed, provide additional and improved service to the communications site holders located at the Indio Hills communication site. The underground pipe that will house the new power lines (see attached project map) would be installed approximately 48 inches underground and for a linear distance of approximately 135 feet. The lines would begin at two existing pull boxes and terminate at the new pull box adjacent to the new equipment cabinet. The existing power pull box located within section 23 was installed by Imperial Irrigation District in 1986 and was installed 20 feet to the north of the section line between public land section 26 and private land section 23. The common access road to the facility crosses from section 26 into section 23 at the top of Indio Hill and the power to the pull boxes was installed along the shoulder of the access road. The new underground cable would be installed within the access/service roads. This line would be installed with the use of a backhoe and backfilled leaving no spoils to be disposed of. This installation is expected to take 10 days to install and make all connections and will take one backhoe, one truck, 4 support vehicles and 5 personnel to complete the project.

B. No Action Alternative

The no action alternative is not to approve the proposed amendment to the right of way grant. Existing management and use of the site would continue subject to applicable statutes, regulations, policy and land use plans.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Area Description

The affected public lands are located within the NE1/4 NW1/4 of section 26, T. 4S., R.7E., SBBM, Riverside County, California. Vegetative cover is minimal. Soils are thin and unproductive due to rockiness, steepness of slope, southern aspect, and the general lack of moisture. The site is not within a Wilderness Area or Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

A. Wildlife / Botany

The rocky exposed creosote scrub habitat supports a sparse cover of creosote (*Larrea tridentata*), burrobush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), *Schismus barbatus*, beavertail (*Opuntia basilaris*) and brittle bush (*Encilia farinosa*). This substrate is unsuitable for the endangered Coachella Valley milkvetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var*. coachellae*) or for the tripple ribbed milkvetch (*Astragalus tricarinatus*), which are thought to prefer sandy

areas and gravelly wash banks, respectively. Neither species has been found in the Indio Hills.
Due to the rocky, hard-packed nature of the soil, the habitat is unsuitable for the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (*Uma notata*) or for the flat tailed horned lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*). Both species occur in the sandy flats which lie at the southeastern end of the Indio Hills about four miles to the southeast. However, the desert horned lizard (*P. platyrhinos*), which prefers a rockier substrate, may occur at the site. Its prey base, harvester ants, are near the site. Other species of lizards that may occur near the site include side-blotched lizards (*Uta stansburiana*) and western whiptails (*Cnemidophorus tigris*).

Crows (*Corvus americana*) were seen near the site and it is likely that Prairie falcons (*Falco mexicanus*) and other raptors also cruise the area from time to time. A rockwren (*Salpinctes obsoletus*) was seen foraging near the bottom of the access road and this species probably also occur up near the communications site.

B. Cultural Resources

A review of records on file in the PSSC office and CHRIS database indicates that two archaeological sites are located within a one-mile radius of the project area: Riv-146T and Riv-196T. Riv-164T is a north-south trending prehistoric trail segment which has its origin in Section 34, southwest of the project APE. Any additional southern extension has been destroyed by modern development. While the CHRIS database and cultural resources base maps indicate that the trail continues north into Section 26, a review of site forms revealed that the northern portion of the trail has not been identified in the field. McCarthy noted in 1980 that the trail provided access to a palm oasis at the base of the hills. No indication was given that the trail continued beyond the oasis and onto the hill.

Riv-196T is a southeast-northwest trending trail that is mapped as occurring on the northern aspect of the Indio Hills. Review of the site form revealed that the site was originally described as being in close proximity to a power line. This would place the trail at the base of the Indio Hills rather than on the hillside itself.

PSSC FO Cultural Resources Specialist, Wanda Raschkow, conducted a field check in September, 2002 with the goal of locating Riv-164T and Riv-196T. The mapped location of 196T traverses a steep and rocky hillside. No indication of a trail was noted.

A very faint trail was identified on a ridge running southwest from the saddle in Section 26. No artifacts or features were associated with this trail and it could not be followed for any great distance. This faint segment may represent a northern extension of Riv-164T, but there is insufficient evidence to confirm this. This trail segment is outside the APE of the current project.

No other cultural resources were identified during the 2002 field check, which included an inspection of the area surrounding the communication facilities. The current project

will take place within areas previously disturbed by access road and communication facility construction. The project's location on top of the Indio Hills makes the presence of subsurface deposits unlikely.

There will be **no effect to historic properties**: no historic properties have been identified within the project area.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Critical Elements

The following table summarizes potential impacts to various elements of the human environment, including the "critical elements" listed in BLM Manual H-1790-1, Appendix 5, as amended. Elements for which there are no impacts will not be discussed further in this document.

Environmental Element	Proposed Action	No Action Alternative
Air Quality	none	none
ACECs	none	none
Cultural Resources	none	none
Native Amer. Concerns	none	none
Farmlands	none	none
Floodplains	none	none
Minerals	none	none
T&E Animal species	none	none
T&E Plant species	none	none
Wastes (hazardous/solid)	none	none
Water Quality	none	none
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	none	none
Wild and Scenic Rivers	none	none
Wilderness	none	none

B. Environmental Impacts

Soils

The proposed action would result in soil disturbance amounting to 0.001 acres. This disturbance would involve soil compaction by vehicles and equipment during the installation of the communication line, mixing of soil horizons in the immediate location of the trench.

Air Quality

As soils are disturbed and become susceptible to wind erosion, there will be a very slight increase in the fugitive dust levels along the length of the installed communication line. Overall, these additional fugitive dust emissions would be very minimal compared to the overall PM-10 levels in the general vicinity of this project resulting from sand and gravel operations, facility development and other human activities.

Plants

There are no plants located within the 0.001 acres of disturbance therefore none would be killed and their habitats degraded as all construction is located within the established access road and the existing communications site right-of-way.

Visual Resources

The trenching site, involving a maximum of 0.001 acres disturbance, would consist of a 135 foot long, two foot wide linear intrusion on the landscape. This intrusion would not substantially impact the visual qualities of this area as the majority of the impact would be within the existing road and shoulders. In addition, numerous other visual intrusions exist in the general vicinity of this site including other communications sites, electrical lines and access roads. After the trench is backfilled and re-contoured, this site would not be noticeable in the overall area.

C. Mitigation Measures

1. No surface disturbance would be authorized outside of the proposed operation areas.

2. If a backhoe or trencher is used and where topsoil is present, top soil would be scraped from the trenching location prior to trenching operations, piled, and protected during the operation. This top soil would then be re-spread over re-contoured areas upon site reclamation in a manner to insure maximum seedbed preparation.

3. The trench would be backfilled and re-grading as required to return the site to a condition approximating the original contour and to allow for re-vegetation.

D. Residual Impacts

The proposed action would result in soil disturbance amounting to 0.001 acres. The residual disturbance would involve soil compaction by vehicles and the equipment during the installation of the communication line, mixing of soil horizons in the immediate location of the trench, scattering of some soil during the operation, loss of vegetation and exposed soils after backfilling and site closure. Until establishment of vegetation, some soil would be lost due to wind and water erosion.

Plants located within the 0.001 acres of disturbance would be killed and their habitats degraded. This site degradation could last for 30 or more years after site closure due to the low rainfall of the region, degradation of soil structure and the potential loss of top soil. Over time, the sites would gradually be re-colonized by pioneer plant species. These species would modify the site and allow for later successional species. Ultimately, any vegetation presently occurring on this site would be expected to become reestablished.

E. Cumulative Impacts

This 0.001 acres of new disturbance would not substantially impact the general location of this proposed line. Numerous electrical lines, access roads and other human impacts exist in this area. Placing the communication line underground and in existing roads greatly lessens the cumulative impact of this facility. This line will facilitate operation of existing communications sites, however, it is expected to facilitate future development of existing facilities. Overall, this project would not result in a substantial increase in human impacts in the area.

PREPARED BY:

Claude Kirby, Project lead, BLM-Realty Specialist.
Mark Massar, BLM-Wildlife Biologist
Wanda Raschkow, BLM-Cultural Resources Specialist

REVIEWED BY;_____
Environmental Coordinator Date

U.S.D.I. BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
DECISION RECORD

NAME of PROJECT: Verizon California, Inc.

DECISION: It is my decision to approve the proposed action as described in environmental assessment (EA) number CA-066-06-13. Compliance with the mitigation measures and monitoring plan identified in the EA are hereby required and are incorporated into this decision record as stipulations by reference.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT: Environmental impacts associated with the proposed action have been assessed. Based on the analysis provided in the attached EA, I conclude that the approved action is not a major federal action and will result in no significant impacts to the environment. Preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

RATIONALE: Based on the analysis documented in the aforementioned EA which has been reviewed by an interdisciplinary team, I conclude that the approved action as stipulated will not result in any unnecessary or undue degradation of the Federal lands. The approved action is in conformance with the approved land use plan.

APPROVED BY: _____Date_____
Field Manager
USDI Bureau of Land Management
Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office
690 W. Garnet Avenue; P.O. Box 1260
North Palm Springs, CA 92258-1260