



United States Department of the Interior  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Washington, D.C. 20240  
<http://www.blm.gov>



**DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY**

FROM: Mike Pool  
Acting Director, Bureau of Land Management

SUBJECT: Record of Decision – East County Substation Project (CA)

**INTRODUCTION**

The Applicant, San Diego Gas and Electric (SDG&E) is proposing to construct and operate the East County (ECO) Substation Project on public and private lands. SDG&E submitted a right-of-way (ROW) application and initial Plan of Development (the Proponent's Environmental Assessment) to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on August 13, 2009, to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission a 1.5-mile segment of the ECO Substation Project's 138 kilovolt (kV) transmission line on public lands. This entire 138 kV line, originally proposed as 13.3 miles, would transmit electricity from the proposed SDG&E ECO Substation to the proposed SDG&E rebuilt Boulevard Substation. The project site is located in southeastern San Diego County, California, approximately 70 miles east of downtown San Diego, south of Interstate 8 (I-8), east of the town of Jacumba and along Old Highway 80.

The Preferred Alternative would increase the route to 13.9 miles, of which 0.8 mile is on BLM administered public lands, and would require a portion of the route to be underground. The project decision (Decision) would authorize a ROW for this route on BLM administered land. The portions of the project on private land are under the jurisdiction of the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), and were authorized on June 21, 2012.

**BACKGROUND**

The BLM received an application for a ROW from SDG&E on August 13, 2009, for the 138 kV transmission line associated with the ECO Substation Project. In addition to the 138 kV transmission line, the Proposed Project includes components such as a newly-constructed ECO Substation, Southwest Powerlink (SWPL) Loop-In, and the Boulevard Substation rebuild, which are located on private lands subject to the permitting authority of the CPUC. The BLM and CPUC analyzed this project in a joint Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR), in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In addition to the ECO Substation Project, the EIS/EIR analyzed the Tule Wind Project and Energia Sierra Juarez (ESJ) Gen-tie as connected actions, as well as the Campo, Manzanita, and Jordan wind energy projects. Although these projects were analyzed in the same EIS/EIR, only the 0.8-mile underground segment of the ECO

Substation Project 138 kV transmission line and portions of the Tule Wind Project would be located on BLM administered lands. The Department of the Interior signed a ROD for the Tule Wind Project on December 20, 2011. The remaining projects analyzed in the EIS/EIR are on private lands and under the jurisdiction of the CPUC.

The EIS/EIR analyzed the site-specific impacts on air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, water resources, geological resources and hazards, hazardous materials handling, land use, noise, and visual resources. This decision does not amend the Eastern San Diego County Resource Management Plan.

Construction of the ECO Substation Project is expected to begin in 2012 and is anticipated to require 24 months to complete. Construction activities associated with the 0.8-mile segment of underground 138 kV transmission line located on BLM administered public lands are anticipated to require 2 months to complete (although it may not be a consecutive 2 months). Commercial operation could commence as early as 2014. The sequence of project construction activities is outlined in the plan of development (POD) on file with the BLM and in the Biological Opinion (BO) provided in Appendix A of the ROD.

## **POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES**

Throughout the process, local residents expressed concern about the cumulative effects from multiple industrial renewable energy and transmission projects in Eastern San Diego County. There was also concern about wildland fire, as this area is subject to large fires. The BLM adopted several mitigation measures in response to this concern. Additionally, some environmental groups opposed to energy development projects in the desert as a whole may not support this project.

Several tribes have expressed concerns about the impacts of the project on cultural resources. The proposed transmission line was rerouted to avoid an important cultural resource site that included cremations. One additional National Register archaeological site is adversely affected on private land owned by SDG&E and will be mitigated through data recovery as required in the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA). The MOA also acknowledges that the Tribes have asserted that there are effects to their cultural and sacred landscape and the Jacumba Discontinuous Archaeological National Register District, although no specific properties were identified in consultation. The ROW grant will include mitigation measures to address this issue.

## **DECISION OPTIONS**

The EIS/EIR considered five action alternatives, and two No Action Alternatives with regard to the ECO Substation Project, including the No Project Alternative 1 (No ECO Substation, Tule Wind, ESJ Gen-Tie, Campo, Manzanita, or Jordan wind energy projects) and No Project Alternative 2 (No ECO Substation Project). Action alternatives considered included:

- (1) Proposed Action, a new 500/230/138 electrical substation, 13.3-mile 138 kV transmission line, loop-in of the existing SWPL to the ECO Substation, a new 13.3-mile 138 kV overhead transmission line running between the proposed ECO Substation, and the rebuilt Boulevard Substation;

- (2) ECO Substation Site Alternative (shifting the proposed substation site 700 feet to the east);
- (3) ECO Partial Underground 138 kV Transmission Route Alternative (rerouting and undergrounding of the proposed 138 kV transmission line) (**Preferred Alternative**);
- (4) ECO Highway 80 138 kV Transmission Route Alternative (rerouting the transmission line north along Old Highway 80 near proposed milepost 5.8 to the rebuilt Boulevard Substation); and
- (5) ECO Highway 80 Underground 138 kV Transmission Route Alternative (rerouting the transmission line north along Old Highway 80 near milepost 5.8 and installing the transmission line underground from this point to the rebuilt Boulevard Substation).

The ECO Substation Project includes the following measures, terms, and conditions:

- Compensation for disturbance quino checkerspot butterfly habitat at 2:1 ratio.
- Compensation for impacts to native vegetation communities at 1:1 ratio.
- Salvage/relocation of special-status plants.
- Historic Properties Treatment Plan-Cultural Resources Management Plan to avoid or minimize and mitigate for impacts to cultural resources.
- Measures to minimize visibility of structures to reduce visual impacts.

The Draft Mitigation Monitoring, Compliance and Reporting Program (MMCRP) for this project is located in Section H of the Final EIR/EIS. The completed plan will be made available in its entirety on the CPUC website for the ECO Substation Project:

<http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/dudek/ecosub/ecosub.htm> before any ground disturbing activity is authorized.

## RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that you approve the Preferred Alternative (ECO Partial Underground 138 kV Transmission Route Alternative) for the ECO Substation Project. Your approval of this decision constitutes the final decision of the Department of the Interior and, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.410(a)(3), is not subject to appeal under Departmental regulations at 43 CFR Part 4. Any challenge to this decision, including the BLM Authorized Officer's issuance of the rights-of-way as approved by this decision, must be brought in Federal district court.

## DECISION BY THE SECRETARY

APPROVE:  X

DISAPPROVE:     

COMMENTS:

AUG 21 2012

*Ken Salazar*

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