



Categorical Exclusion Form

Project: SUP-Southern California Gas, Immediate Response Inspections west of Essex Road

Project Number: 13-moja-046/PEPC 48765

Project Description:

Southern California Gas Company recently completed in-line (smart pig) inspections of its Line 235 natural gas pipeline that partially crosses Mojave National Preserve. The inspection report identified two sites in the Preserve that require Immediate Response inspection. These locations are approximately 3.1 and 4.1 miles west of Essex Road. Per Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002 Department of Transportation regulations, the gas company must start Immediate Response inspections of these two sites within five days of the release of the report.

The two dig locations are situated in desert tortoise critical habitat. A motor grader or front-end loader may be used to repair the right-of-way access road; per on-site inspection by the gas company (Chris Sowell, 08/14/2013), there is up to one mile of road that may need minor repairs. Repair equipment will include a track-hoe, back-hoe, side-boom or crane truck, water truck (for dust control and fire prevention), welding rigs, pickup trucks and portable toilets. There will be up to 20 personnel on site at any time (construction personnel, supervisory personnel, and biological monitors). The gas company will provide on-site security to stay with the equipment overnight. Repairs are anticipated to take five to six weeks to complete.

The gas company will segregate and salvage the top six inches of soil and vegetation, to be re-spread over the excavation at the completion of the project. Cleared plant material will be used as horizontal mulch. Each location will be excavated approximately 100' in length, and no greater than 50' in width, the same width as the right-of-way corridor. Any cacti or yucca in the construction zone will be avoided or transplanted out of the work area. Desert tortoise protective measures will be implemented. In particular, a pre-construction survey will be completed 24 hours before ground is broken at each site. Sensitive areas will be identified and flagged. Open pipeline trenches will be surrounded by desert tortoise fencing. In addition, trenches will be outfitted with escape ramps.

Project Locations:

Location 1

County:	San Bernardino	State:	CA
District:	Clipper Valley	Section:	BLM ROW CALA 164983
Geo. Marker:	Dig Site 1 (GIS Point)	Other:	34.9108050N -115.4810329W

Location 2

County:	San Bernardino	State:	CA
District:	Clipper Valley	Section:	BLM ROW CALA 164983
Geo. Marker:	Dig Site 2 (GIS Point)	Other:	34.9115304N -115.4990854W

Mitigation(s):

- **Desert Tortoise:** Vehicles traveling in groups must be spaced far enough apart to ensure visibility of the road surface.
- **Desert Tortoise:** Check under vehicles before operating.
- **Desert Tortoise:** A biological monitor must walk in front of the vehicle to check for desert tortoise sign. The monitor can halt work immediately if DT sign is observed. Work can be restarted only after the monitor has given clearance for the area.
- **Desert Tortoise/Underground Construction:** The proponent shall be required to restore disturbed areas in a manner that will assist re-establishment of biological values within the disturbed right-of-way. Methods of restoration include but are not limited to: road closure, reduction of erosion, respreading of the top two to six (2-6) inches of soil, planting with appropriate native shrubs, and scattering any bladed vegetation and rocks, where appropriate, across the right-of-way.
- **Desert Tortoise/Underground Construction:** Open trenches shall be regularly inspected by the authorized biologist at a minimum of once per day. Any desert tortoises encountered shall be safely removed. For small projects, escape ramps may be required. The length of the trench left open at any given time shall not exceed that distance which will remain open for one week or less in duration. A final inspection of the open trench segment shall be made by the authorized biologist immediately prior to backfilling. Arrangements shall be made prior to the onset of maintenance or construction to ensure that desert tortoises may be safely removed from the trench without violating any requirements of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
- **Desert Tortoise/Underground Construction:** Construction rights-of-way shall be restricted to the narrowest possible width. All project construction and maintenance shall be restricted to the authorized right-of-way. If unforeseen circumstances require expansion beyond the right-of-way, the potential expanded work areas shall be surveyed for desert tortoise.
- **Desert Tortoise/Grading:** To avoid building up of tall berms that may inhibit movement of desert tortoises, the equipment operator should minimize lowering of the road bed while grading. Berms higher than 12 inches or at a slope greater than 30 degrees shall be pulled back into the road bed.
- **Desert Tortoise/Construction:** The project site must be surveyed to locate and remove desert tortoises prior the start of the project. The survey shall be conducted by an authorized biologist within 24 hours of the onset of surface disturbance (grading and other road repairs). The biologist must be authorized by the US Fish & Wildlife Service to survey and handle tortoises for this project.
- **Desert Tortoise/Construction:** Staging area(s) must be identified in advance of the project, and surveyed for desert tortoise sign before the project begins.
- **Desert Tortoise/Construction:** Equipment operator(s) shall watch for desert tortoise on the road whenever driving, transporting or operating equipment. Driving speeds shall not exceed 20 miles per hour and operating speeds shall not exceed five (5) miles per hour, to allow for adequate visibility.

Describe the category used to exclude action from further NEPA analysis and indicate the number of the category (see Section 3-4 of DO-12):

C.15 Installation of underground utilities in previously disturbed areas having stable soils, or in an existing utility right-of-way.

Explanation:

Mojave National Preserve staff has completed an expedited review of the proposed action and potential impacts to the natural and cultural resources of the park. It was agreed among the reviewers that this project should move forward without delay. The archeological survey prepared in late 2012 for road maintenance along this same right-of-way is still valid; the park archeologist does not anticipate any adverse impacts to cultural resources from the Immediate Response Inspection. The wildlife biologist is similarly unconcerned about impacts to wildlife, as long as desert tortoise protective measures are implemented. In particular, a clearance survey must be completed 24 hours before ground is broken; open trenches must be surrounded by temporary desert tortoise fencing and fitted with escape ramps. Impairment is not expected to result from the proposed action. In conclusion, a special use permit may be issued to Southern California Gas Company to move forward with this work.

On the basis of the environmental impact information in the statutory compliance file, with which I am familiar, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No exceptional circumstances (e.g. all boxes in the ESF are marked "no") or conditions in Section 3-6 apply, and the action is fully described in Section 3-4 of DO-12.

Superintendent: Stephan R. Davis Date: 8-19-13

NPS Contact: [Signature] Date: 19 August 2013