

DECISION MEMO
USDA Forest Service, Sequoia National Forest
Kern River Ranger District
Kern County, California

Southern California Edison Company
Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project

BACKGROUND

Southern California Edison Company's (SCE) Borel Hydroelectric Project, FERC Project No. 382 is located on the lower Kern River on the western side of the Sierra Nevada, located near Bodfish, California. The project is located on National Forest System land within the Sequoia National Forest on the SW ¼ of the SW ¼ Section 10, T27S, R32E; Mount Diablo Base and Meridian.

Rehabilitation of the switchyard located adjacent to the Borel Powerhouse is proposed by SCE (Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project). Facility equipment has deteriorated at the Borel Powerhouse Switchyard and replacement is necessary to maintain operations. Please refer to the attached Project Location Map for the location of project features.

PROPOSED ACTION

SCE proposes to rebuild and replace various facility equipment located at the Borel Powerhouse Switchyard. All work will be performed on previously disturbed ground within the Borel FERC project boundaries. Proposed work within the existing footprint of the switchyard facility will include demolition and reconstruction of existing facilities, and trenching to install conduit for a power cable. The laydown areas will be located in the existing paved parking area in front of the powerhouse. Some minor tree trimming will be necessary along the main powerhouse access road to improve access for large vehicles that will deliver the new equipment and remove the old equipment. No trees are proposed for removal. The existing access path located on the perimeter of the existing fenced switchyard will be improved to allow for the removal and installation of the transformer units within the switchyard. The access path ranges from 9 to 15 feet wide and will require minor cut and fill, including adding an 8-inch base of ¾-inch crushed rock. A retaining wall will be constructed at the base on the slope, on the west side of the access path.

The majority of the work, with the exception of tree trimming along the access road, will be on previously disturbed ground within the fenced switchyard facility area, and immediate perimeter. Work will include:

1. Access path improvements and construction of the retaining wall
2. Replacement of the transformer bank
3. Replacement of three 66 kV circuit breakers

4. Demolition and reconstruction of concrete footings for 3 circuit breakers and transformer bank
5. Install oil containment around transformer bank
6. Trenching and installation of new conduit for power cables
7. Reconfigure the rack structure and install new disconnects and footings

Improvements to the switchyard will be confined to the existing switchyard approximately 100 x 200 feet (20,000 square feet). The staging area is approximately 17,500 square feet and will be located within the existing paved parking lot of the powerhouse. Please refer to the attached Project Engineering Drawings for a depiction of the proposed work.

Equipment to be utilized during construction may include: crane, forklift, backhoe or excavator, concrete trucks, air compressor, welder, portable power tools, and various support vehicles.

This project is proposed to start in the fall of 2010. Estimated duration of construction is 3-4 months.

Project specific resource reports have been drafted by SCE, and were submitted to the Sequoia National Forest on August 25, 2010. The following resource specific plans have been incorporated into the project file: Sensitive Species Protection Plan (Condition 15), Erosion and Sediment Control Plan (Condition 16), Land Resource Plans for Mitigating Project Effects to NFS Resources (Condition 21), Fire Management and Response Plan (Condition 21A), Visual Management Plan (Condition 21B), Biological Resource Management Plans for Mitigating Project Effects to NFS Resources: Noxious Weed Risk Assessment and Plan (Condition 24), and Roads and Transportation Management Plan (Condition 27).

DECISION

I have decided to authorize rehabilitation of the Borel Switchyard. An environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS) is not necessary. I have reviewed the resource conditions pertaining to extraordinary circumstances (see below) and have determined that no extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude the use of a categorical exclusion in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations at 40 CFR 1508.4. The project, as designed, will have little to no effect on the natural or human environment.

Further, I find that the Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project meets the requirements found at 36 CFR 220.6(d) (3): "Repair and Maintenance of Administrative Sites." The purpose of this rehabilitation project is to allow SCE to maintain existing permitted facilities and continue operations of the hydroelectric project.

REVIEW OF EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES

In deciding whether a categorical exclusion may be used, the responsible official must assure there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an Environmental Assessment (EA) or Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). In accordance with FSH 1909.15 Section 30.3, the following resource conditions were considered in

determining whether extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS:

- **Federally listed, threatened or endangered species, designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing, proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.**

Construction will be performed on previously disturbed ground within the Borel FERC project boundaries and therefore contribute no further impact to local flora and fauna.

A biological survey of the Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project area was completed on February 10 and March 18, 2010. The results of the survey concluded that no federally or state protected species will be affected by activities associated with the Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project. Survey results were summarized in the report, *Biological Determination: Determination of No Effect on Listed Species Borel Switchyard Rehabilitation Project, Kern County, California*. The survey report was reviewed by Steve Anderson (USFS). On September 10, 2010, Mr. Anderson confirmed via email that the biological documents met the USFS needs for biological evaluation and biological assessment, that no extraordinary circumstances were present, and that the determination of “no effect” was valid.

- **Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.**

Floodplains: Executive Order 11988 provides direction to avoid adverse impacts associated with the occupancy and modification of floodplains. Floodplains are defined by this order as “...the lowland and relatively flat areas adjoining inland and coastal waters including flood prone areas of offshore islands, including at a minimum, that area subject to a one percent [100-year recurrence] or greater chance of flooding in any one year.” The project area is located within the 100-year floodplain of the Kern River; however, this project constitutes an upgrade to existing equipment, in an area where construction of such facilities has been authorized in the past.

The project is within and will not affect the Bakersfield municipal watershed.

- **Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or national recreation areas**

The project area does not lie within any wilderness, wild and scenic river corridor, or national recreation area.

- **Inventoried Roadless Areas.**

The project is not within any designated roadless area.

- **Research Natural Areas.**

There are no Research Natural Areas in or adjacent to the project area.

- **American Indian and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites.**

There are no American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites in the project area. Although no cultural resources were identified in the project area, the following Tribes, Tribal Councils and Native American groups were notified of the project by a scoping letter and information package dated February 16, 2010:

Bishop Paiute Tribe, Dunlap Band of Mono Indians, Eshom Gathering, Kawaiisu Tribe, Kern Valley Indian Community, Kern Valley Indian Council, Kern Valley Paiute Council, Monache Intertribal Association, Sierra Nevada- Native American Coalition, Traditional Choinumni Tribe, Tubatulabals of Kern Valley, Tule River Tribal Council, Wukchumni Tribal Council, and Wuksachi-Michahai Tribe.

- **Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.**

A *Cultural Resource Assessment* of the project area was completed in April 2010, and approved by the District Archaeologist in June 2010. Two historical resources were found within the vicinity of the switchyard facility; however neither resource will be impacted by the project.

The current project poses no adverse affect to the identified cultural resources located within the Borel powerhouse complex property. The facility itself has been evaluated not eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). The proposed project constitutes a screened undertaking pursuant to the Regional Programmatic Agreement (PA). No heritage resources will be adversely affected by the proposed project and no further action is required. If any additional or previously unidentified cultural resources are located during project implementation, the find must be protected from operations and reported immediately to the Heritage Resource Staff. All operations in the vicinity of the find will be suspended until the site is visited and appropriate recordation and evaluation is made by the District Archaeologist.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A description of the proposed action was mailed to 64 interested parties on February 16, 2010. No comments were received during the public scoping period. The District Archaeologist, District Wildlife Biologist, and District Recreation Officer were also consulted during public scoping period.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS

National Historic Preservation Act. The requirements of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, have been observed by following the stipulations of the *First Amended Regional Programmatic Agreement Among The USDA Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region, California State Historic Preservation Officer, And Advisory Council On Historic Preservation Regarding The Process For Compliance With Section 106 Of The National Historic Preservation Act For Undertakings On The National Forests Of The Pacific Southwest Region or 36CFR800.*

Endangered Species Act. No threatened, endangered, or candidate species are affected by this project.

Migratory Bird Treaty Act. This project will not affect snags, recruitment snags, green tree retention, down wood, and diversity which will provide for migratory bird habitat at the project scale.

Clean Water Act. The project does not involve work in California State Waters. The project will be conducted in accordance with requirements of the California Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control board to ensure compliance with the California Water Code and the Federal Clean Water Act.

Clean Air Act. The project will be conducted in accordance with the Clean Air Act, the conformity provisions of the Clean Air Act, California's Title 17 (Smoke Management for Agricultural and Prescribed Burning), and local air pollution control district regulations.

National Forest Management Act. This action is consistent with the goals, objectives, and management direction of continuing a minimum level of administration of special uses that meet current direction except where higher levels are warranted on a case by case basis and it does not conflict with forest management objectives of the Sequoia National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Record Of Decision. It is also consistent with the Sequoia National Forest Mediated Settlement Agreement.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Project implementation is proposed for October 2010; contingent upon necessary approvals and contractor and equipment availability.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITY

This decision is not subject to appeal pursuant to Forest Service Regulations at 36 CFR 215, Notice, Comment, and Appeal Procedures for National Forest System Projects and Activities, section 215.4(a).

CONTACT PERSON

For additional information concerning this decision or any other questions, please contact Artie Colson, Special Use Officer, at (760) 379-5646, extension 562, or send to the Sequoia National Forest, Kern River Ranger District, P.O. Box 3810, Lake Isabella, CA 93240.

R.J.

TINA J. TERRELL
Forest Supervisor
Sequoia National Forest


Date

Attachments





Sequoia National
Forest
Kern River
Ranger District

**Project
Location Map**

Southern
California Edison
Company

*Borel Switchyard
Rehabilitation
Project*

Legend

-  Approximate extent of work area
-  Proposed staging area

