

# **DECISION MEMO**

## **SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA EDISON (SCE) VETERAN CIRCUIT PERMIT ISSUANCE**

### **USDA FOREST SERVICE LOS ANGELES RIVER RANGER DISTRICT ANGELES NATIONAL FOREST LOS ANGELES COUNTY, CALIFORNIA**

#### **BACKGROUND**

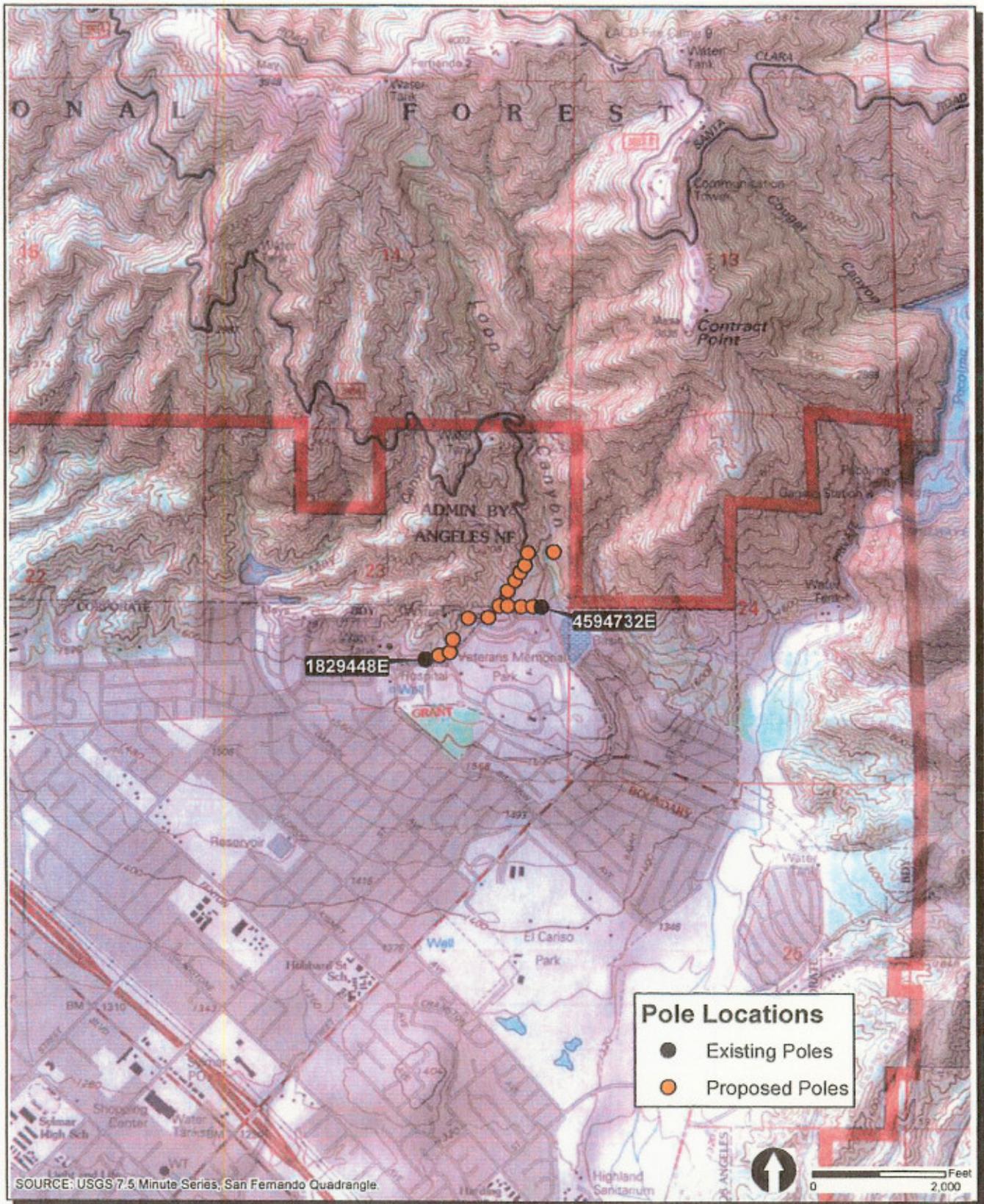
The Sayre Fire, which burned November 15 through November 21, 2009, caused extensive damage to SCE's Veterans 16kV Circuit located on the Los Angeles Ranger River District, Angeles National Forest. The damage included burned poles and conduit as well as other support appurtenances. The damage has rendered the Veteran Circuit inoperable which results in the electronic sites and County Facilities along the Santa Clara Divide having to rely on generators for power.

The Veteran Circuit was constructed to support the Los Pinetos NIKE Base Complex when it was constructed in 1955-1956. The Veteran Circuit on Forest Service lands was authorized by the Angeles National Forest through a Special Use Permit. A portion of the Veterans Circuit also passed through lands administered by the Veterans Administration. This land later reverted to the Forest Service management by 1957.

#### **DECISION**

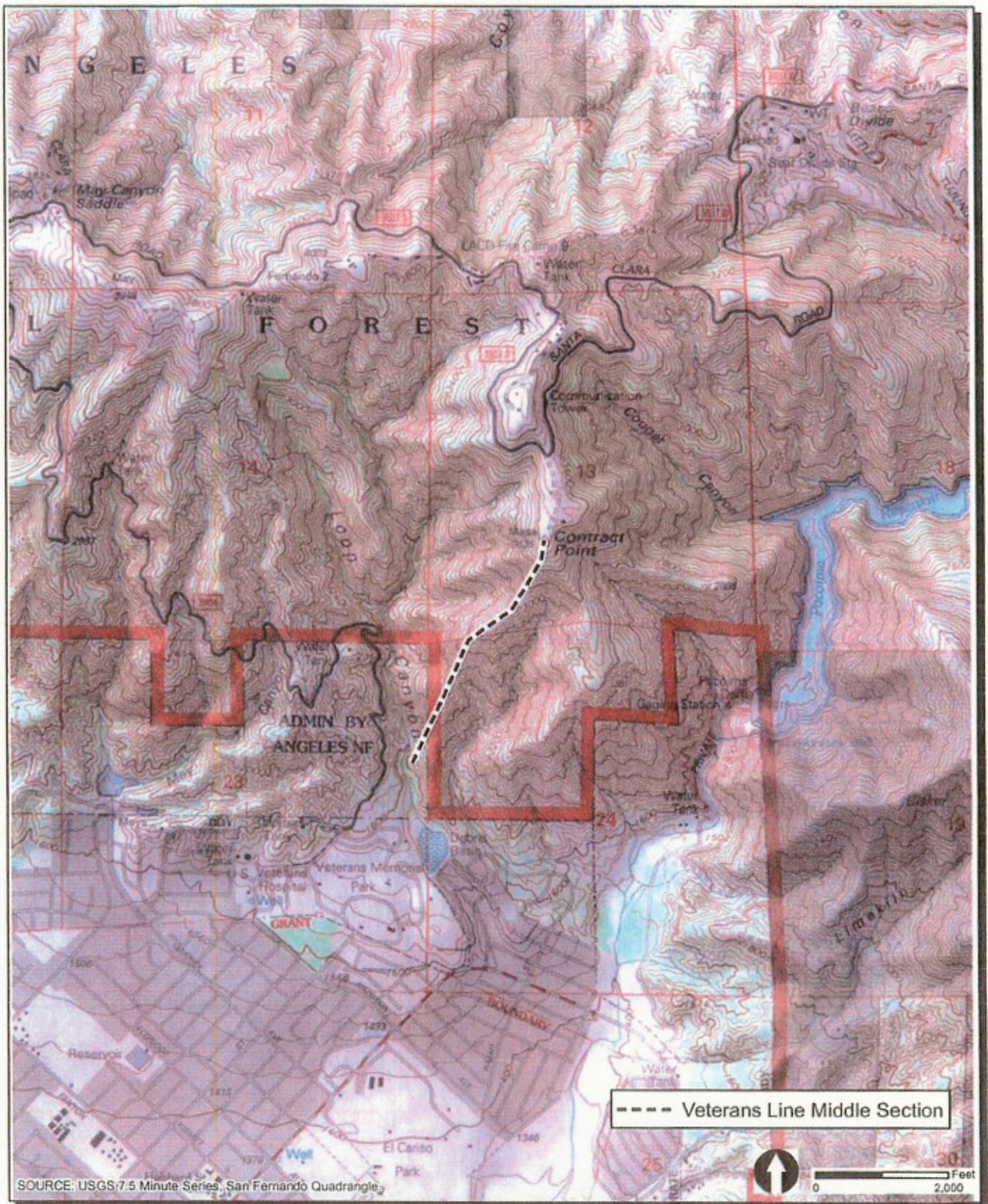
It is my decision to approve the amending of SCE's current permit for its Angeles area distribution lines (LAR403011B) to allow the replacement and reroute of the overhead and underground conductor, poles and associated appurtenances damaged or impacted by the Sayre Fire. The reroute of existing line is to avoid impacts to resources as well as to minimize impacts from installation and allow for better long-term maintenance access.

This project would re-establish a previously existing electrical distribution line, and will provide a more stable power service to SCE's customers located along the Santa Clara Divide. This project will reduce the length of overhead conductor in an area that has identified Condor use. It will also protect an archaeological site. The project follows the direction and intent of the Forest Land Management Plan as well as Regional Direction regarding distribution lines [R5 Supplement 2700-92-08 (11/18/92) 2726.43 – Powerline], and would not result in adverse environmental effects. Characteristics of the project site are summarized in Table 1 and the location of the project site is illustrated on the map in Figures 1-3.



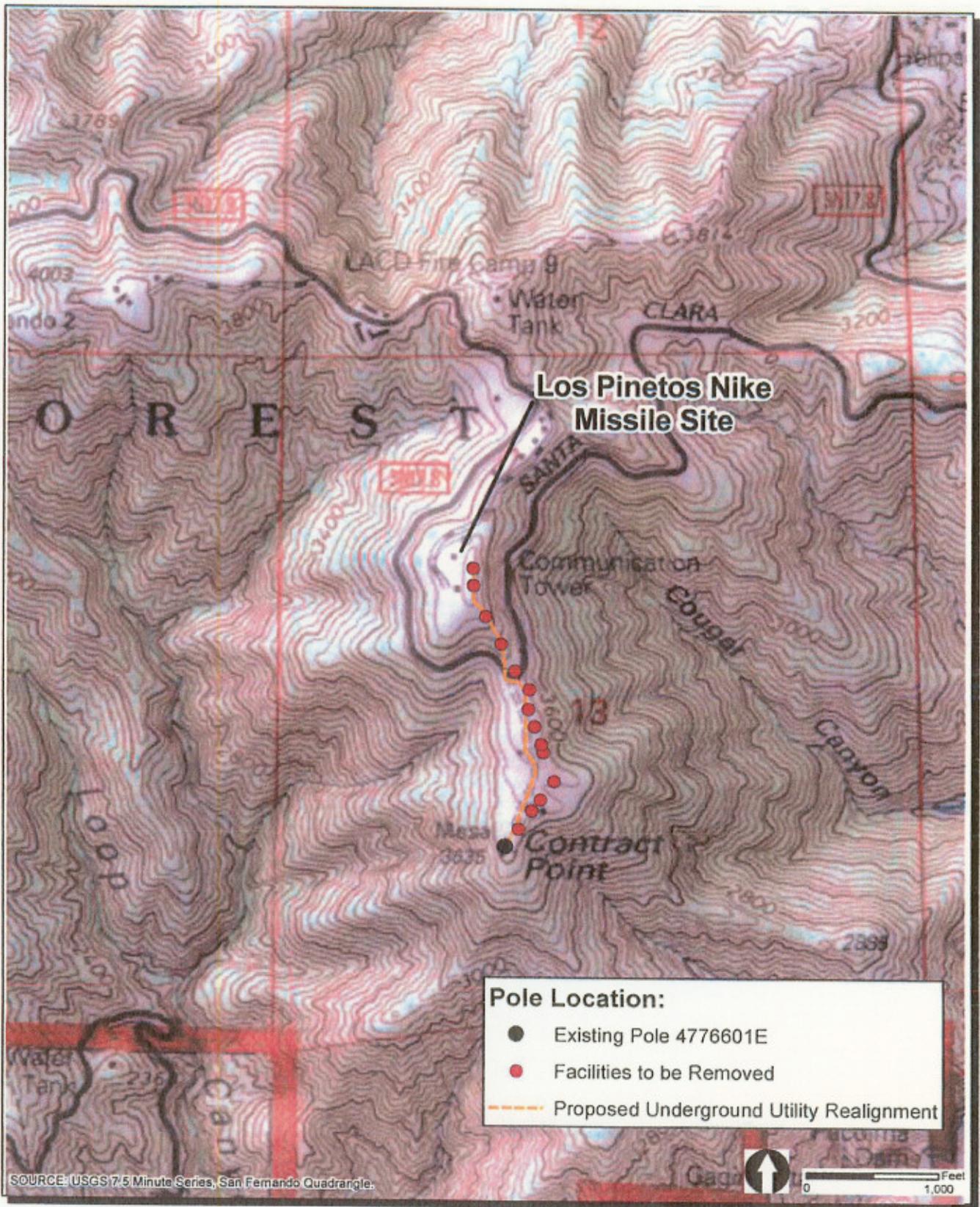
Sayre Fire Veterans Line Relocation  
Vicinity Map Lower Section

FIGURE  
1



Sayre Fire Veterans Line Relocation  
Vicinity Map Middle Section

FIGURE  
2



Sayre Fire Veterans Line Relocation  
Vicinity Map Upper Section

FIGURE  
3

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Project Site**

<b>Project Name</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Elevation Range</b>
Veterans Circuit	Township 3N, Range 15W, Sections 13 (NW1/4), 14 (NE1/4) and 23 (W1/2) of the <i>San Fernando, California</i> U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5 minute topographic quadrangle	Permit Acreage will increase by .45± acres	1,820 to 3,880 feet

***Project Description***

Southern California Edison is proposing to replaced damaged poles and conductor as well as a partial reroute of the distribution line because of resource issues. There will be sixteen new poles installed, fourteen poles removed, and 2,126 feet of conductor will be installed underground. The lower portion of the route will be relocated adjacent to an existing egress/ingress road for ease of maintenance and resource concerns resulting in the installation of new poles. The middle portion has had the poles replaced in their original location so conductor will be restrung FROM. The route of the upper portion will be trenched and buried underground in an existing graded road. Fourteen poles will be removed in this section.

The general project site is accessible from the Santa Clara Divide Road (FS Road 3N17), May Canyon Road (FS Road 3N54), and the Contractor Point Access Road as well as previously existing distribution line right-of-way. Workers will access the project areas via foot and existing roads. Ground disturbing activities will be limited to digging holes for the new poles, filling the holes from the old poles, and trenching for the underground line. The poles along the road in the lower portion will be set by hand and truck until which time the route travels eastward to meet the lower end of the middle portion. Poles along this segment of the lower portion will be set by helicopter. The conductor will be strung using a helicopter.

***Mitigation and Minimization Measures***

The avoidance and minimization measures included in Appendix A are incorporated into my decision, and are mandatory conditions of the authorization for this project.

**REASONS FOR CATEGORICALLY EXCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION**

The proposed action falls under the following category of actions that may be excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA) and normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the human environment:

- Categorical Exclusion 31.2 #2 [(36 CFR 220.6(e)(2))]:** “Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor.”
- (ii)** Reconstructing a power line by replacing poles and wires.

The environmental analysis conducted for the proposed action determined that there were no extraordinary circumstances or conditions that would result in significant adverse effects. Extraordinary circumstances include, but are not limited to, the following:

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

Southern California Edison personnel performed surveys associated with a biological evaluation/biological assessment (Angeles National Forest 2009a). Project activities will not affect any threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species. Project activities will not affect designated or proposed habitat for any listed species. Project activities may affect individuals of Forest Service Sensitive Species but will not lead towards a trend in Federal listing or loss of viability.

**2. Flood Plains, Wetlands, or Municipal Watersheds**

The proposed project area does not encompass or is not anticipated to adversely affect floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

**3. Congressionally Designated Areas, Such as Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or National Recreation Areas**

There are no congressionally designated areas within the project area (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005).

**4. Inventoried Roadless Areas**

The project area is not located within an inventoried roadless area (Angeles National Forest, 2000).

**5. Research Natural Areas**

There are no research natural areas within the project area (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2005).

**6. American Indians and Alaska Native Religious or Cultural sites**

Regularly scheduled meetings and correspondence with the Native Americans on general Forest issues and mutual concerns have not identified any American Indian or Alaska Native religious or cultural sites of concern located within the treatment areas.

**7. Archaeological Sites or Historic Properties or Areas**

Compass Rose, Inc., with follow-up by SCE Heritage Resource Staff on May 11, 2009, conducted an Archaeological Reconnaissance and produced a report on January 9, 2009. Cultural resources were encountered during the survey. One archaeological site was discovered along the original alignment of the Veterans Circuit. The Forest Heritage Resource Program Manager has deemed project activities as an undertaking where management measures are necessary for protection of historic properties and it is necessary to notify Project planner, manager, or implementer (Stip. I[B-2]), establish a buffer zone (Stip. I[C]), protect through project modification, redesign, or elimination (Stip. I[D]), and monitoring. Project-specific

stipulations are detailed in the Project Section 106 Programmatic Agreement Tracking form (Angeles National Forest 2009b).

**SCOPING & PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

Internal scoping was conducted by the following resource specialists: District and Supervisor’s Office Botanists and Biologists, Forest Archaeologist and Forest Heritage Staff, Forest Special Use Administrators, and Los Angeles River Ranger District staff. No significant issues or extraordinary circumstances precluding the action were raised.

**FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

This proposed action is consistent with management direction (Angeles National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan), as required by the National Forest Management Act (FSM 1926.41 and FSH 1909.12); National Environmental Policy Act; Endangered Species Act; National Historic Preservation Act; Clear Water Act; Clean Air Act; and, all other applicable Acts.

This action will not require a Civil Rights Impact Statement because it will not have a significant impact on the social environment.

**IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

Implementation of this decision may occur immediately upon final execution of the authorization document.

**ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW OR APPEAL OPPORTUNITIES**

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.12(f), this decision is not subject to review or appeal.

APPROVED  /s/Michael J. McIntyre\_\_\_\_\_      DATE  6/22/2009\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael McIntyre  
District Ranger  
Los Angeles River Ranger District

## **REFERENCES**

- Angeles National Forest. 2000. Inventoried Roadless Areas Map. Roadless Area Conservation. September 15, 2000. Available: <http://www.roadless.fs.fed.us/states/ca/ange.pdf>.
- Angeles National Forest. 2009a. Biological Evaluation/Assessment for Southern California Edison Sayre Fire Veterans Line Relocation. Prepared by Southern California Edison, Inc., June 15, 2009.
- Angeles National Forest. 2009b. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 Programmatic Agreement Project Implementation Tracking Form for Southern California Edison Veterans 16kV Emergency Pole Relocation Project. Prepared by Darrell W. Vance, Heritage Resource Program Manager, May 13, 2009 (revised).
- U.S. Department of Agriculture 2005. Land Management Plan – Part 2 Angeles National Forest Strategy. Pacific Southwest Region R5-MB-076. September 2005.

## **Appendix A**

### **Avoidance and Minimization Measures**

### *Avoidance and Minimization Measures*

The following avoidance and minimization measures shall be implemented to avoid the potential for significant adverse effects to sensitive environmental resources. These measures are mandatory conditions of project authorization:

#### **General:**

1. Cross-country use of vehicles and equipment is prohibited unless previously approved. Vehicles and equipment will be kept on existing roads, parking areas and turnarounds.
2. Plan to minimize foot-traffic to the greatest extent possible.
3. No new roads will be constructed and no existing roads will be widened or improved.
4. All equipment must contain appropriate spill containment kits to respond to leaks and spills.
5. Soil disturbance will be minimized and all appropriate BMPs will be implemented.
6. Nighttime work (and use of artificial lighting) will not be permitted.
7. Upon completion of the project, all unused material and equipment shall be removed from the site.
8. Crews will obey the speed limit when driving within designated project area. The speed limit of unpaved right-of-way roads is 15 miles per hour.
9. Helicopters will not land or refuel on Forest Service land unless previously approved. Helicopter flight information will be provided to the Forest Dispatch prior to its use.
10. Wildfires shall be prevented or minimized by exercising care when driving and by not parking vehicles where catalytic converters can ignite dry vegetation. In areas of high fire hazard, all vehicles shall carry a fire extinguisher and shovel. Personnel shall exercise care when smoking in natural habitats.

#### **Biological:**

11. In order to avoid and minimize impacts to nesting birds, work associated with this project will occur outside the typical nesting period for most bird species in the project area (i.e., outside the period March 15 to August 15) to the extent practicable.
12. If construction does take place within the bird breeding season, the disturbance area will be inspected for nests prior to initiating work. If nesting bird nests are found during project implementation, activities will cease in the immediate area and the project biologist will be notified. The biologist in coordination with the USFWS, CDFG and the USFS will determine whether activities can resume without impacting nesting birds or whether to stop activities in the immediate area until the young have fledged and the nest

is vacant (as determined by the project biologist). This measure will avoid impacts to nesting birds that could nest in the project region.

13. All Poles will be installed to be raptor safe
14. A qualified biological monitor must be present during construction activities in areas known to contain or with a high potential to contain special-status species. This includes but is not limited to the portion of the line starting at Contract Point and ending at the Nike Site.
15. Preconstruction biological surveys must be performed by a qualified biologist to determine whether special status species are present. If present, they should be relocated outside the affected area to ensure that they are not harmed. Pre-construction plant surveys will be conducted by Forest Service botanists.
16. To avoid entrapment of lizards and other wildlife, excavations that will be left open and unattended for more than 12 hours must include an escape ramp constructed to the bottom of the pit with less than a 2 to 1 slope. Prior to commencement of work activity each day, staff will check all excavations to make sure no animals are trapped. Before backfilling any excavation, it must be checked to make sure that no wildlife are present.
17. Crews will be instructed to not feed, touch, handle or collect any wildlife. During construction, debris piles will be avoided, as this may be habitat for special-status wildlife species.
18. A field contact representative (FCR) from SCE's Environmental Affairs Division shall be responsible for overseeing compliance with protection measures for sensitive species and their habitats.
19. Personnel shall exercise caution when using access roads to avoid and minimize collisions with sensitive species.
20. Use of unpaved access roads during evening, nighttime and early morning hours shall be minimized to the extent feasible to avoid harassing, harming, or killing crepuscular and nocturnal species.
21. Trash and food shall be stored in closed containers and removed daily to reduce attractiveness to opportunistic predators such as coyotes, domestic and feral dogs, and cats, opossums, skunks, and raccoons. Littering of trash and food waste is prohibited.
22. Observations of any sensitive species or their diagnostic sign during project activities shall be conveyed to the project field supervisor the day observed. The field supervisor shall convey this information to the FCR or its designee and the ANF biologist/botanist within 24 hours of the observation.

23. All vegetation-disturbing activities (removal and trampling) shall be conducted in a manner that avoids or minimizes the potential for disturbance of a sensitive species. The area of disturbance shall be confined to the smallest practical area and all special habitat features of a sensitive species (e.g., burrows, snags, etc.) shall be avoided to the extent feasible. During project activities, ingress/egress, staging areas, stockpiling, equipment storage, lay down areas, positioning of equipment, and any other potential habitat-disturbing activities shall be limited, to the extent practicable, to areas of permanent disturbance within project site. Where this is not possible, previously disturbed areas or areas with the lowest quality habitat shall be used.
24. SCE has an Endangered Species Alert Program whereby all SCE operations, maintenance and construction personnel undergo training designed to educate staff about sensitive biological resources. The training program includes information on the biology of the sensitive species and their occurrence in Project Area, legal protection, measures being implemented for the protection of the species and their habitats during project activities, penalties for violations of state and/or federal laws, reporting requirements, and any means by which individual personnel can facilitate the protection of the species. Wallet-sized cards signifying completion of the training program are issued to personnel completing the program and are kept in their possession at all times while in the field.

#### ***Condor Specific Avoidance and Minimization Measures***

25. All microtrash and debris resulting from the construction of the proposed project will be collected and disposed of daily.
26. The Nike Site and Contract Point portion of the power line will be placed underground in order to avoid potential condor collisions. Existing poles will be removed from this portion of the line.
27. For the Nike Site and Contract Point portion of the power line, a biological monitor must be onsite to observe the construction activities in order to avoid interactions with the construction equipment and the condors. Should condors attempt to interact with the construction crews or equipment, USFWS approved hazing techniques should be used to encourage the birds to vacate the worksite. If these efforts fail, the USFWS and the USFS must be contacted immediately to determine the appropriate course of action.

#### **Botanical:**

28. Hand dig holes and use helicopter pole drops for new pole installation within native vegetation and areas where special-status species may occur.
29. New poles will be placed in areas that have minimum short term and long term impacts on trees such as the coast live oak (*Quercus agrifolia*).

30. To prevent the spread of noxious weeds, Forest Service guidelines for vehicle and equipment washing must be implemented (Exhibit A).
31. Post-project monitoring will be required to detect any invasive plant occurrences. For the first two years, invasive plant monitoring will be conducted by both a qualified botanist and the SCE pole inspection staff. After the first two years, monitoring will be conducted by SCE pole inspection staff as part of the annual pole inspections. SCE staff will be trained and have photos of possible invasive species. The training will be performed by SCE and/or Forest Service staff. The training will be concise enough for non-resource staff to understand basic invasive species identification. In addition, SCE staff will take photos of any plant suspected to be invasive and submit them to the Forest Botanist. Documentation of completed surveys will be submitted to the Forest Botanist. Necessary information will include poles surveyed, dates of surveys, any possible invasive species and any photographs taken. Target populations of noxious weeds will be immediately treated by SCE under the direction of the Forest Botanist.

**Archaeological:**

32. Protection of Archaeological Sites

a) Lower Segment:

- The use of mechanical equipment is not permitted within the boundaries of site FS# 05-01-55-236.
- Existing burnt poles located within the identified boundaries of site FS# 05-01-55-236 will be flush cut, rather than excavated and removed.
- An Archaeological Monitor must be present for all ground disturbing work in the vicinity of FS# 05-01-55-236. An archaeological monitoring supplement for the implementation will be submitted as an addendum to the existing documentation, upon project conclusion.

b) Upper Segment:

- Underground conduit replacement will be implemented so as not to affect any portions of the Nike Base. All historical features, including the existing fenceline and pavement, will be avoided by ground disturbing activities.
- An Archaeological Monitor must be present for all ground disturbing work all work north of Santa Clara Divide Road, in the vicinity Los Pinetos Nike Missile Base. An archaeological monitoring supplement for the implementation will be submitted as an addendum to the existing documentation, upon project conclusion (this may be packaged with the Lower Segment report).

## Exhibit A

FSM 2081.03, directs the Forest Service to require all equipment be cleaned when working in a site contaminated with noxious weeds. To limit the spread and establishment of invasive plant species into the project area, all off-road heavy equipment used during the project implementation will be free of noxious weeds and seeds. If any equipment enters an area where weeds occur, it will be washed to remove weed propagules prior to entering an area free of weeds. Protocol for equipment and vehicle washing is as follows:

- 1) All ground-disturbing equipment except trucks, vans, pickups, and cars used for daily transport of personnel, will be cleaned (either washed or air-blasted) prior to entering Forest Service land. This includes wheels, undercarriages and bumpers. Washing must take place where rinse water is collected and disposed of in either a sanitary sewer, a landfill, or other facility authorized to accept such rinse water. If vehicles and equipment enter sites with noxious weeds or go off-road, then they must be cleaned after leaving the noxious weeds contaminated area or are no longer off-road.
- 2) In addition, all tools such as chain-saws, shovels, hand clippers, pruners, etc. must also be washed BEFORE AND AFTER its use at all project sites.
- 3) When vehicles and equipment are cleaned, a daily log must be kept (see following example), stating:
  - Location
  - Date and time
  - Methods used
  - Staff present
  - Equipment cleaned
  - Signature of responsible crew member
- 4) These written logs will be turned in every week. SCE should turn in written logs to the District Special Use Permit Administrator who will provide copies to the Forest Botanist.
- 5) Any new infestations of invasive species in the work area or on the access route shall be promptly reported to the Forest Botanist.
- 6) Upon request, the Forest Botanist can provide a current list of invasive species of concern.

## CERTIFICATION OF CLEANING EQUIPMENT

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Holder: \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that the following equipment is free of soil, seeds, vegetative matter, or other debris that could contain or hold seeds. Cleaning was done outside the proclaimed boundary of any National Forest.

Equipment Description, Identification Number	Location of last Operation or Storage	Cleaning Location	Date Cleaned

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Holder or Authorized Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Inspected by Forest Service (at FS discretion): \_\_\_\_\_  
FS Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Certification is needed any time equipment is moved onto National Forest land or between work sites for this project.