

IV.11 LAND USE AND POLICIES

This chapter addresses potential land use impacts from renewable energy development, specifically electric transmission projects outside of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) decision area. These transmission lines and their infrastructure would support future renewable energy generation projects (solar, wind, and geothermal) built within Development Focus Areas (DFAs) on BLM lands within the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan area. These transmission facilities would occupy existing transmission rights-of-way (ROWs) on federal lands under BLM, the U.S. Forest Service, and Department of Defense jurisdictions, as well as on private land. Private lands used for transmission fall under the jurisdiction of the California Public Utilities Commission.

Several resource chapters of the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) address both specific land use and environmental impacts upon those lands. Both long-term and short-term impacts to land use from renewable energy development on BLM lands are described in the following chapters in this volume of the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS:

- IV.2 Air Quality
- IV.4 Soils and Geology
- IV.5 Flood Hazard, Hydrology, and Drainage
- IV.7 Biological Resources
- IV.9 Native American Interests
- IV.12 Agricultural Land and Production
- IV.13 Bureau of Land Management Lands and Realty
- IV.14 Bureau of Land Management Land Designations, Classifications, Allocations, and Lands with Wilderness Characteristics
- IV.15 Mineral Resources
- IV.16 Livestock Grazing
- IV.18 Outdoor Recreation
- IV.19 Transportation
- IV.20 Visual Resources
- IV.21 Noise and Vibration
- IV.23 Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice
- IV.24 Department of Defense Lands and Operations

Discussions and analyses of impacts on specific land uses in those chapters are not repeated here. The focus in this chapter is the extent to which transmission projects could conflict with existing land uses, land use plans, and other policies on lands outside the LUPA Decision Area.

IV.11.1 Approach to Impact Analysis

Transmission project development can have both direct and indirect environmental impacts, in both the short term and long term. Direct effects are those with a clear connection to the construction and operation of a facility. Indirect effects are those that are not immediately related to the project but nonetheless caused by it. These would include growth-inducing and other effects related to induced changes in patterns of land use, population density, or growth rates, and related effects on air, water, and other natural systems, including ecosystems. Short-term impacts occur for a short time both during and after an activity (e.g., construction noise and dust). Long-term impacts continue over an extended period.

The Proposed LUPA would allow renewable energy project development within identified DFAs on BLM lands in the DRECP area. Each proposed development would undergo an individual National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for project-specific impacts. Impacts related to renewable energy projects and their associated facilities would vary, depending on the technology, the project location, the timing and degree of disturbance, and the size and complexity of facility construction and land alterations.

The DRECP area includes a portion of seven counties (Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego) and 21 cities. Based on land use information provided for each county, a range of existing and planned land uses occurs within the DRECP area, including agriculture, residential (includes mixed use, rural and specific plan and community development designations), commercial, industrial, open space, and other uses (e.g., road rights-of-way [ROWs]). Chapter III.11 discusses the regulatory setting, planning documents, and existing land uses in these counties.

Potential land use conflicts may result from development of transmission on lands outside of DFAs. Potential impacts from transmission can be physical incompatibilities with existing or authorized land uses or inconsistencies with applicable land use plans, policies, or regulations.

This chapter discusses the potential impacts to land uses resulting from the No Action Alternative, the Preferred Alternative, and Alternatives 1 through 4. Because this is a programmatic EIS, the impact analysis is based upon the types of potential impacts associated with transmission development generally, rather than upon a specific project.

IV.11.2 Typical Impacts Common to All Action Alternatives

IV.11.2.1 Impacts of Transmission Development

This section describes typical land use impacts associated with transmission projects that could result from renewable energy project development in DFAs.

Adopted land use plans and policies may affect the locations of ROWs for transmission facilities that serve renewable energy projects. In most cases, transmission line ROWs could be located to avoid sensitive existing land uses and comply with existing adopted plans and policies.

IV.11.2.1.1 Impacts of Site Characterization

Site characterization activities for transmission projects may include construction of temporary access roads, borings for geotechnical studies, and other activities associated with site reconnaissance, including reclamation and recontouring of disturbed areas. Activities during the site characterization phase could result in temporary impacts that disrupt existing land uses.

IV.11.2.1.2 Impacts of Construction and Decommissioning

Activities associated with construction of transmission facilities include ground-disturbing activities (vegetation clearing, grading, and excavation), establishment of staging areas, and installation of temporary fencing and drainage. Construction activities also include the movement of personnel, vehicles, equipment, and materials to, from, and within project sites. Project decommissioning activities include removal of project infrastructure and restoration and revegetation of the land. These activities would be temporary, but they could potentially disrupt existing land uses or conflict with existing applicable policies or regulations.

IV.11.2.1.3 Impacts of Operations and Maintenance

Activities associated with the operation and maintenance of transmission facilities include operation, maintenance, repair, replacement of project components, dust suppression, and fire and fuel management. Development of transmission facilities would require the long-term use of land, which could convert land from existing uses. Operation and maintenance activities would be ongoing, and could potentially disrupt existing land uses.

IV.11.3 Impact Analysis by Alternative

The following sections present impact analyses for the No Action Alternative, the Preferred Alternative, and Alternatives 1 through 4 with regard to transmission development on lands that are outside DFAs.

IV.11.3.1 No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, the Proposed LUPA would not be adopted, so it is assumed that renewable energy and transmission projects, and mitigation for those projects, would be developed on project-by-project basis, in similar fashion to how siting proceeds now. Those projects would conform to applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations of authorizing jurisdictions. The No Action Alternative would therefore not provide a region-wide plan to direct development to appropriate locations based on the resource values and site conditions analyzed in the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS . The renewable energy development and conservation assumptions associated with the No Action Alternative are described in Volume II.

The discussions in the following sections describe the impacts from future renewable energy development and conservation under the No Action Alternative, relative to the baseline conditions presented in Volume III, Chapter III.11, Affected Environment.

IV.11.3.1.1 Impacts of Transmission Development

Under the No Action Alternative, California's renewable energy goals would still be achieved without the DRECP or Proposed LUPA; up to 20,000 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy development and supporting transmission, and mitigation for those projects, would still be built on a project-by-project basis in the DRECP area, in patterns similar to how projects are currently built.

Impact LU-1: Development on BLM-managed lands would affect non-BLM lands.

Under the No Action Alternative, transmission facilities would be developed on an as-needed basis, depending on the location of renewable energy facilities and potential interconnections. Transmission lines are developed as linear corridors that traverse many types of land uses, including urban areas with high-density residential and commercial land uses. The development of transmission lines typically results in short-term impacts to nearby land uses during construction. These types of impacts are discussed in detail in Chapters IV.2, Air Quality; IV.19, Transportation and Public Access; IV.20, Visual Resources; and IV.21, Noise and Vibration. Long-term impacts from transmission lines, such as land conversion, would be minimal because transmission poles or towers require a negligible

amount of land, are minimally disruptive to adjacent land uses, and would generally be developed in existing ROWs and corridors.

IV.11.3.1.2 Impacts of Ecological and Cultural Conservation and Recreation Designations

The Proposed LUPA would designate ecological and cultural conservation and recreation areas only on BLM-administered lands. There would be no impacts to private lands.

IV.11.3.1.3 Impacts of Transmission Outside the DRECP Area

Additional transmission lines would be required to deliver renewable energy to load centers (areas of high demand) outside the DRECP area. It is assumed that new transmission lines outside the DRECP area would use existing transmission corridors between the DRECP area and existing, upgraded, substations in the more heavily populated areas of the state. Transmission line development occurs within linear corridors that traverse many types of land uses, including urban areas with high-density residential and commercial land uses. New transmission lines might be constructed outside the DRECP area in the San Diego, Los Angeles, North Palm Springs–Riverside, and Central Valley areas. These areas and corridors are described in Volume III, Section III.11.8, Transmission Out of DRECP area.

Impact LU-1: Development on BLM-managed lands would affect non-BLM lands.

Short-term land use conflicts from transmission line development outside the DRECP area would occur from construction-related disturbances. During preconstruction and construction activities, impacts to existing land uses in or adjacent to a transmission line project ROWs could cause increased noise levels, dust, and emissions from construction equipment; degradation of scenic resources due to the presence of construction activities or equipment; and exposure to hazards or hazardous materials. Detailed discussions of potential impacts from transmission facility development outside the DRECP area are included in Chapters IV.2, Air Quality; IV.19, Transportation and Public Access; IV.20, Visual Resources; IV.21, Noise and Vibration; and IV.22, Public Safety and Services.

Long-term operational impacts from transmission lines could include permanently converting existing land uses to transmission uses, precluding other planned uses. Long-term impacts, such as the conversion of land, would, however, be minimal because transmission poles and towers are widely spaced and require small amounts of land, so existing compatible land uses (e.g., agriculture, recreation, open space, and parking) can often continue in ROWs.

Transmission corridors outside the DRECP area are expected to be in existing high-voltage transmission line ROWs or adjacent to or near these existing lines. In areas that are not

developed, such as in National Forest System lands or in the Central Valley, future transmission lines would not prevent most existing land uses given the proximity of existing lines. In urban areas, existing corridors are well-defined ROWs, typically with adjacent buildings and roads. New lines in existing ROWs would be a compatible use.

On federal lands (e.g., National Forest System land and BLM-administered lands), the agencies having jurisdiction would conduct project-specific application reviews. They would determine whether there is a conflict with existing or planned land uses or use designations (e.g., Forest Land Management Plans or BLM Resource Management Plans). On lands under local county or municipal jurisdiction, the CPUC has jurisdiction for transmission line siting and approval. In its regulatory role, the CPUC traditionally works closely with local jurisdictions to ensure policy consistency.

IV.11.3.2 Preferred Alternative

IV.11.3.2.1 Impacts of Transmission Development

Under the Preferred Alternative, renewable energy activities covered by the Proposed LUPA would be confined to DFAs on BLM lands within the DRECP area. Indirect land use impacts from renewable energy development within the DFAs would occur from electric transmission facilities needed outside the DFAs.

Impact LU-1: Development on BLM-managed lands would affect non-BLM lands.

Renewable energy generation projects under the Preferred Alternative would be concentrated on designated DFAs on BLM lands in Imperial, Kern, Riverside, Inyo, and San Bernardino counties. There is conflict potential with existing and planned land uses from required transmission outside of these BLM lands.

Land use conflicts from transmission development would occur from short-term construction-related disturbances. During preconstruction and construction activities, impacts to existing land uses either on or adjacent to a transmission corridor could include increased noise levels, dust, and emissions from construction equipment; degradation of scenic resources; and exposure to hazards or hazardous materials. Potential impacts are discussed in depth in Chapters IV.2, Air Quality; IV.19, Transportation and Public Access; IV.20, Visual Resources; and IV.21, Noise and Vibration.

Long-term effects of transmission line development include land use conversion and the possible preclusion of some planned land uses. Transmission lines are located within linear corridors that traverse many types of land uses, including urban lands with high-density residential and commercial uses. Development of transmission projects typically causes short-term impacts to nearby land uses during construction. These impacts are described

in Chapters IV.2, Air Quality; IV.19, Transportation and Public Access; IV.20, Visual Resources; and IV.21, Noise and Vibration. Long-term environmental impacts from transmission lines (e.g., land conversion) are minimal because transmission poles and towers occupy small land areas and are widely spaced, often allowing existing land uses to continue in their ROWs.

IV.11.3.2.2 Impacts of Ecological and Cultural Conservation and Recreation Designations

The Proposed LUPA would designate ecological and cultural conservation and recreation areas only on BLM-administered lands. There would be no impacts to private lands.

IV.11.3.2.3 Impacts of Transmission Outside the DRECP Area

The impacts of transmission outside the DRECP area on land use and policies would be the same under all alternatives. These impacts are as described for the No Action Alternative in Section IV.11.3.1.5.1, Impacts of Transmission Outside the DRECP Area.

IV.11.3.2.4 Comparison of the Preferred Alternative with No Action Alternative

Compared to the No Action Alternative, the Preferred Alternative would have fewer potential conflicts with agency plans and policies because it would require fewer miles of transmission lines. Otherwise, the impacts would be the similar.

IV.11.3.3 Comparison of the Preferred Alternative with Other Action Alternatives

As noted in the introduction, this chapter addresses only potential land use impacts and conflicts with applicable existing county plans in areas outside of the LUPA Decision Area. While different transmission lines would be required in each alternative, the only consideration relevant to transmission would be project locations. It is expected that, where workable, new transmission lines would be sited in existing transmission corridors.

For the Preferred Alternative and the four other action alternatives, required transmission lines outside the DRECP area would be similar for each alternative. Within the DRECP area, the amount of transmission development that might be required for the Preferred Alternative and Alternatives 2, 3 and 4 would be similar.

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