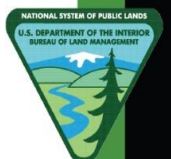


United States Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management

**Finding of No Significant Impact**  
DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2020-00114-EA

SOUTHERN TRANSMISSION SYSTEM  
REPLACEMENT PROJECT  
ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT  
N-97266 and N-97266-01

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## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

### **Background**

Environmental Assessment (EA) DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2020-0114-EA analyzed the No Action Alternative and Proposed Action. The Proposed Action, as described in Chapter 2 of the EA, would allow Southwest Gas Corporation (SWG; the Proponent) to install 69.5 miles of new 24-inch diameter steel natural gas pipeline Southern Transmission System Replacement Project (project) within SWG existing permanent rights-of-way (ROWs).

### **Finding of No Significant Impact**

Based upon a review of DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2020-0114-EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment.

The environmental effects are not significant (40 CFR 1501.3(b)) and do not exceed those effects as described in the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1998). Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) to further analyze possible impacts is not required pursuant to Section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969.

### **Affected Area**

The EA evaluated the area of the proposed facilities and determined no unique geographic characteristics such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, Prime or Unique Farmlands, designated Wilderness areas, or Wilderness Study Areas were present or within the immediate vicinity.

The proposed facilities are located within the Piute/Eldorado Valley Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC), which is designated as critical habitat for the Mojave desert tortoise and includes crucial habitat and winter range for desert bighorn sheep; however, the proposed facilities do not cross through winter range habitat and therefore resulting in no impact to desert bighorn sheep.

A portion of the project goes through the Boulder City Conservation Easement (BCCE) that was established in 1995 by a partnership between Clark County and the City of Boulder City and is managed by the Clark County Desert Conservation Program. It was specifically created to protect habitat for Mojave desert tortoise as a mitigation effort for developmental impacts within Clark County. The BCCE is located on lands owned by Boulder City. The proposed facilities will be located within portions of the BCCE and SWG has coordinated with the Clark County Desert Conservation Program to minimize impacts within the BCCE. Impacts to Mojave desert tortoise are discussed under Threatened or Endangered Species section below.

In addition, the proposed facilities are located within BLM-designated Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMAs). Temporary trail or partial area closures may occur during construction of the proposed facilities; however, each SRMA would be restored to pre-construction conditions upon completion of each project phase. Project-related construction activities are not anticipated to result in long-term impacts to the SRMAs.

To protect public safety during construction, the public would not be allowed access to the construction ROWs. No project-related impacts to the safety of individuals using BLM-administered lands are anticipated.

Conditions in these BLM Special Land Designations areas during pipeline operation and maintenance would be consistent with the existing conditions with limited to infrequent traffic and human presence along the existing pipeline ROW and road. No new or expanded access would be needed for SWG to operate and maintain the new pipeline after completion. Maintenance and operation of the project would result in long-term yet minor disturbance because similar disturbances already occur in association with the existing pipelines.

### **Degree of the Effects of the Action**

#### Both short- and long-term effects:

The EA considered various types of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects on both public and private land within the geographic area of the selected action. A cumulative impacts discussion for each resource is included in Chapter 3 of the EA. No significant site specific or cumulative impacts associated with the project have been identified that could not be avoided through mitigation, or that are inconsistent with those identified within the Las Vegas Resource Management Plan (RMP).

To comply with Title 54 United States Code (U.S.C.) §300101, et. seq., commonly known as the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended (NHPA), and Title 54 U.S.C. §306108, commonly known as Section 106 of the NHPA (Section 106), the BLM Archaeologist conducted an existing data and archival review. All portions of the project area have been evaluated for historic properties within the last twenty years. There are historic properties within the Area of Potential Effects (APE) but the project will have no adverse effect on historic properties and loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources will not occur.

As discussed in Chapter 3 of the EA, the construction, operation, and maintenance of the project may result in potential impacts to federally listed, threatened, or endangered and BLM sensitive species habitat. Specifically, potential impacts to Mojave desert tortoise would result from increased traffic levels, noise, and human presence during construction. However, potential impacts would be short-term and would subside once construction is complete and be mitigated to below the level of significance by the measures described in Chapter 3 of the EA.

In 2019, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) finalized a programmatic biological opinion (PBO, USFWS 2019) with the BLM Southern Nevada District Office for potential effects on 19 federally listed species and critical habitat for 13 of these species, including Mojave desert tortoise. The PBO includes potential effects from ROWs issued by the BLM consistent with the Proposed Action. Under the PBO, each BLM action that may result in an incidental take of a protected species must have an incidental take statement. For BLM actions that may result in impacts to Mojave desert tortoise, the PBO describes several mitigation and minimization measures. Additionally, SWG has also developed a Wildlife and Desert Tortoise Monitoring, Management, and Mitigation Plan to mitigate impacts during construction.

The PBO allows the BLM and USFWS to “extend Southern Nevada District Office discretion to non-Federal lands” thus covering actions within the entire project area including private landowner’s agreement to ensure compliance with the PBO. All private landowners along the proposed pipeline ROW have agreed to allow the BLM oversight of the project.

#### Both beneficial and adverse effects:

As described in the EA, the Proposed Action would allow SWG to replace pre-code vintage steel infrastructure with modern materials using current construction standards and practices. The

purpose of the project would be to improve reliability and safety while decreasing maintenance needs. Additionally, the project would allow SWG to maintain operating flexibility and take advantage of lower natural gas rates as they become available from other natural gas sources south of the project.

The construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed facilities may impact resources as described in chapter 3 of the EA. These potential impacts include increased risk of impacts to Mojave desert tortoise habitat and the spread of noxious weeds, temporary impacts to visual resources, impacts to soil resources, and vegetation. Through the implementation of mitigation measures, temporary and permanent impacts will be minimized to levels of less than significant.

Effects on public health and safety:

The environmental analysis documented no significant effects on public health and safety from any of the actions described in the Proposed Action. SWG would design, construct, operate, and maintain the proposed facilities in accordance with U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulations at Title 49 CFR Part 192, "Transportation of Natural Gas and Other Gas by Pipeline; Minimum Federal Safety Standards," and other applicable federal and state regulations. The standards imposed are in accordance with the Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1968, as amended.

During the construction of the proposed facilities, SWG's contractor (and any subcontractors) would be required to follow all applicable Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) safety standards and all SWG safety standards and procedures. These standards include special safety procedures to follow whenever workspace is within 25 feet of a residential or commercial building.

SWG's operation and maintenance activities include routine visits to perform activities such as safety inspections and monitoring, pigging and integrity management activities, cathodic protection maintenance and repair, and replacement and maintenance of components such as regulators and valves.

The proposed facilities would be added to SWG's existing pipeline inspection program. Continuing surveillance of SWG's pipeline system is conducted in accordance with USDOT requirements to determine the appropriate action concerning possible changes in class location, failures, USDOT notification, leakage history, corrosion, substantial changes in cathodic protection requirements, and other unusual operating conditions. Operation and maintenance activities would also conform to all relevant safety regulations, as well as SWG's safety and emergency plan manuals.

Effects that would violate Federal, State, Tribal, or local law protecting the environment. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial:

The Proposed Action does not violate any known federal, state, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. According to the BLM NEPA Handbook (Section 7.3), this factor often overlaps with others, such as the "public health" factor. The project will not violate environmental laws as documented in the EA and in this FONSI.

Because there is always some uncertainty and risk regarding the effects of land management actions, the decision-maker must exercise some judgment in evaluating the degree to which the effects are likely to be highly uncertain and risks are unique or unknown. The selected action is

not unique or unusual, and understanding of the resources in the area is thorough. The effects of the construction, operations, and maintenance activities for the proposed facilities are well understood, and the BLM has extensive experience evaluating the environmental effects associated with ROW authorizations. The environmental analysis did not identify any highly uncertain, unique, or unknown risk effects on the human environment which would result from authorizing the project.

Effects on the quality of the human environment from authorizing the selected action are not likely to be highly controversial from a scientific perspective. The action of granting a ROW, for any purpose, is one which may evoke strong emotional responses in some people. The location of the project within critical habitat for Mojave desert tortoise may also be seen by some as controversial. However, granting of a ROW to SWG for replacing pre-code vintage steel infrastructure with modern materials using current construction standards and practices within an existing pipeline right-of-way that was previously partially disturbed is a permissible use of public land and not likely to evoke significant negative responses.

Reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Planning & Environmental Coordinator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Approved by: \_\_\_\_\_  
April Rabuck, Assistant Field Manager  
Las Vegas Field Office, Division of Lands

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date