



# U.S. Department of Energy Categorical Exclusion Determination Form

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Proposed Action Title: Blythe-Knob 161-kV Transmission Line, Structure Maintenance Project

Program or Field Office: Western Area Power Administration, Desert Southwest Regional Office

Location(s) (City/County/State): Riverside and Imperial counties, California

Proposed Action Description:

Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to conduct maintenance activities along its existing Blythe-Knob (BLY-KNB) 161-kV transmission line in eastern Riverside and Imperial Counties, California (Figures 1A and 1B). The alignment is about 65 miles in length, between the Blythe Substation near Interstate 10 in Riverside County, and the Knob Substation near Interstate 8 in Imperial County. The project is located on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California State Trust lands, and private or non-government lands. All of the structures and access roads are located between approximately 300 and 1,130 feet elevation. The alignment is located on the USGS Ripley, Roosevelt Mine, Thumb Peak, Palo Verde Peak, Buzzards Peak, Mount Barrow, Nine Mile Wash, Quartz Peak, Hedges, Ogilby and Araz 7½-minute topographic quads.

The scope of work includes conducting maintenance activities at 115 of 484 total wood H-frame structures along the transmission line. Some structures would receive more than one type of maintenance repair treatment, including replacing cross arms, cross braces, insulators, ground wires, and armor rods. Wood pole replacements will be conducted at 22 structures and pad work (i.e., management to repair erosion or improve access) at 11 structures. Structure pad maintenance will be limited to within 50 feet of each structure.

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied:

B1.3 - Routine maintenance

For the complete DOE National Environmental Policy Act regulations regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see Subpart D of 10 CFR Part 1021.

Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410(b): (See full text in regulation)

The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.

To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Based on my review of the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as authorized under DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

NEPA Compliance Officer: *Shirley Maresca*

Date Determined: 1.21.14

# Blythe-Knob 161-kV Transmission Line Maintenance Project - Continuation Sheet

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## **Project Description (continued)**

The proposed project also includes vegetation management in one portion of the access road, at the crossing through Indian Wash in the vicinity of structure 50-6. Vegetation management at this site would consist of hand-cutting branches and limbs within the road prism to allow vehicle access, but no removal of vegetation beyond the road margins.

Equipment used to conduct maintenance may include bucket trucks, line trucks, crew trucks (F-550s or similar), pole trailers, and bulldozers. No access road repairs, improvements, or new construction will occur as part of this project. Project activities will begin no earlier than November 1, 2014, and will be completed in phases over approximately two years.

## **Special Conditions**

### ***A. Biological Resources:***

1. No project activities will be conducted in tortoise habitat or critical habitat during the desert tortoise active season (April 1-May 31 and September 1-October 31).
2. Western will designate a qualified biologist to act as a Biological Monitor to be present during all project construction activities. A "qualified biologist" is defined as a person with appropriate education, training, and experience to conduct tortoise surveys, monitor project activities, provide worker education programs, and supervise or perform other implementing actions. The person will be approved by the Service, and must demonstrate an acceptable knowledge of tortoise biology, mitigation techniques, habitat requirements, sign identification techniques, and survey procedures. Evidence of such knowledge may include work as a compliance monitor on a project in desert tortoise habitat, work on desert tortoise trend plot or transect surveys or other research or field work on desert tortoise.

Responsibilities will include, but will not be limited to (1) monitoring the locations of burrows found during pre-project surveys and any activity of desert tortoise along the alignment; (2) regular inspection of the work areas, including access routes and other areas related to project activities, for desert tortoise, special-status species and nesting birds; (3) regular inspection beneath vehicles and equipment to ensure that they do not present potential hazards to desert tortoise or special-status lizard species; and (4) escort all construction vehicles traveling within critical habitat. The Biological Monitor will be authorized by Western to temporarily halt construction activity if needed to prevent harm

to desert tortoise. The work supervisor will coordinate with the Biological Monitor on planned or ongoing activities and any specific monitoring requirements.

3. Pre-construction clearance surveys (100% coverage, 15-ft transects) shall be conducted no more than 7 days prior to project construction at any location. A qualified biologist will survey the transmission line structures and associated work sites (e.g., equipment staging areas) for desert tortoise and all special-status species. The qualified biologist will also be required to designate appropriate buffer areas to avoid impacts to any special-status species or nesting birds found at work sites, mark the buffer areas in the field using colored flagging or other conspicuous marking, and notify project workers of the requirement to avoid disturbance to the areas. The Biological Monitor will provide these survey results in a memo to WAPA prior to the onset of construction activities, with any appropriate recommendations to avoid impacts to these resources.
4. All employees of the project proponent who work on-site shall participate in a tortoise and environmental awareness education program prior to initiation of field activities. The project proponent (Western) is responsible for ensuring that the education program is developed and presented prior to conducting on-the-ground activities. New employees shall receive formal, approved training prior to working on site. The program may consist of a class presented by a qualified biologist or a video approved by Western's Environmental Affairs. Wallet-sized cards or a one-page handout with important information for workers to carry are recommended. The program shall cover the following topics at a minimum:
  - i. distribution of the desert tortoise,
  - ii. general behavior and ecology of the tortoise,
  - iii. sensitivity to human activities,
  - iv. legal protection,
  - v. penalties for violations of State or Federal laws,
  - vi. reporting requirements, and
  - vii. project protective mitigation measures.
5. Work area boundaries shall be delineated with flagging or other marking to minimize surface disturbance by vehicles. Work limits for all tower maintenance shall not exceed beyond the right-of-way and the tower pad earthwork maintenance will not exceed beyond the 50 ft radius from the tower structure. Special habitat features, such as burrows identified by the qualified biologist, shall be marked, buffered (as noted in #2, above) and avoided. If a desert tortoise is observed within the defined work area, construction will be halted and the tortoise will be allowed to move away from the work area on its own accord. At any time a desert tortoise is seen within or near any work area (including access road, turnouts, staging areas, etc.), the Biological Monitor and project supervisor will be immediately notified. Biological Monitors may not handle desert tortoise; any unauthorized handling of a desert tortoise could constitute "take" as defined in the Act.
6. Upon locating a dead or injured tortoise, the project proponent or agent is to immediately notify the BLM Resource Area Office, Palm Springs South Coast Office at (760) 833-

7100. The BLM must then notify the Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office of the Service by telephone within three days of the finding. Written notification must be made within five days of the finding, both to the Service's field office (above) and Division of Law Enforcement in Torrance (310-328-1516). The information provided must include the date and time of the finding or incident (if known), location of the carcass or injured animal, a photograph, cause of death, if known, name of the observer, and other pertinent information.

An injured animal shall be transported to a qualified veterinarian for treatment at the expense of Western (if project related). If an injured animal recovers, the appropriate field office of the Service shall be contacted for the final disposition of the animal.

The BLM shall endeavor to place the remains of intact tortoise carcasses with educational or research institutions holding the appropriate State and Federal permits. If such institutions are not available or the animal's remains are in poor condition, the information noted above shall be obtained and the carcass left in place. If left in place and sufficient pieces are available, the BLM (or its agent) shall attempt to mark the carcass to ensure that it is not reported again. Arrangements for disposition to a museum shall be made prior to removal of the carcass from the field.

7. Except on county-maintained roads, vehicle speeds shall not exceed 20 miles per hour through desert tortoise habitat.
8. Workers shall inspect for tortoises under any parked vehicle prior to moving it. If a tortoise is present, the worker shall carefully move the vehicle only when necessary and when the tortoise would not be injured by moving the vehicle or shall wait for the tortoise to move out from under the vehicle.
9. No dogs shall be allowed on site. Workers will not be permitted to feed, harm, or handle wildlife at any time.
10. All trash and food items shall be promptly contained within closed, raven-proof containers. These shall be regularly removed from the project site to reduce the attractiveness of the area to ravens and other tortoise predators.
11. Raven management will be addressed within a step-down regional Avian Protection Plan. To aid in this effort, baseline nesting bird information will be gathered during this maintenance project. Information will include stick nest locations, tower number, and notation of species nesting (if possible). Biological monitors will note if juvenile tortoise carcasses or bones are located underneath any observed stick nests and report this information the Service.
12. Native birds (MBTA, BGEPA, and California Fish and Game Code): The project has the potential to take birds or their nests, either on transmission line structures or in habitat that may be disturbed during construction. Therefore, project activities will take place between September 1 and December 30, outside of the breeding season, as feasible. If project activities must occur during the breeding season, a pre-construction survey will be conducted to identify all nesting birds in the area. In addition to the birds protected by the MBTA, implementing this recommendation will also minimize impacts and avoid take of special-status bird species including Gila woodpecker, elf owl, and burrowing owl.

13. Golden eagle: In order to prevent disturbance (and potential take) of nesting golden eagles, project activities will take place between September 1 and December 30, outside of the breeding season (consistent with #4, above) as feasible. If project activities must occur during the breeding season, Western will minimize any potential disturbance (vehicle activity, noise, lighting, or other activities) to nesting golden eagles within line of sight or two miles of project activities. To determine golden eagle nest locations adjacent to the alignment Western will either (1) conduct nesting season golden eagle surveys along the alignment or (2) coordinate with government agencies or private companies that are already conducting surveying for golden eagles throughout the area.
14. Burrowing owl: If an active burrowing owl burrow is observed within the project alignment at any time of year, the Biological Monitor will designate and flag an appropriate buffer area around the burrow where activities will not be permitted. The extent of the buffer area will be based on the nature of project activity.
15. Bats: Special-status bats have the potential to roost on transmission line structures and in adjacent suitable habitat, such as rocky outcrops. To the extent feasible, rocky outcrops will be avoided so that roosting bats, if present, are not impacted. In addition, the Biological Monitor will inspect each transmission line pole or cross arm prior to disturbance to determine if bats are roosting and, to the extent feasible, project activities may be rescheduled to avoid the roosting bats.
16. Nelson's bighorn sheep: If a bighorn sheep is observed, it will be left to move away from the work site on its own. Project workers, including the Biological Monitor, will not approach, disturb, or harass a bighorn sheep at any time.
17. Desert kit fox: If a desert kit fox, or potential den site, is observed within the project alignment it will be avoided. Project workers, including the Biological Monitor, will not approach, disturb, or harass desert kit fox at any time. No potential desert kit fox den sites will be destroyed or damaged by project activities.
18. Avoid wildlife hazards or attractants: No potential wildlife pitfalls (trenches, bores, temporary detention basins, and other excavations) will be left uncovered. If covering or backfilling are not feasible, excavations shall be sloped at 3:1 at the ends to provide wildlife escape ramps, or fully enclosed with desert tortoise-exclusion fencing. All trenches, bores, temporary detention basins, and other excavations shall be inspected periodically, but no less than three times, throughout the day and at the end of each workday by the Biological Monitor. Any wildlife encountered during the course of the project shall be allowed to leave the project area unharmed. Any pipe, culvert, or similar structure with a diameter greater than 3 inches, stored less than 8 inches aboveground for one or more nights, shall be inspected for tortoises before the material is moved, buried, or capped. As an alternative, all such structures may be capped before being stored outside the fenced area, or placed on pipe racks.
19. Minimize Standing Water: Water applied to dirt roads and work areas (trenches or spoil piles) for dust abatement shall use the minimal amount needed to meet safety and air quality standards to prevent the formation of puddles, which could attract desert tortoises and common ravens to project sites. The Biological Monitor shall patrol these areas to ensure water does not puddle and shall take appropriate action to reduce water application where necessary.

## B. Cultural Resources

1. Cultural Monitor: A cultural monitor shall be present for all project activities involving ground disturbance in the immediate vicinity of archaeological sites, including but not limited to pole replacements and structure pad maintenance. The cultural monitor shall ensure that the following stipulations are carried out:
  - a. Prior to deploying mechanized equipment (pickup trucks, crew trucks, bucket trucks, cranes, backhoes and bulldozers), the project area will be inspected by the cultural monitor to identify the presence/absence of prehistoric artifacts and features;
  - b. The cultural monitor shall delineate areas approved for work by using flagging or a comparable means of visible identification. Project work will be prohibited outside the flagged areas;
  - c. At Structure 43-1, project work shall be restricted to existing disturbed areas, including the small drainage adjacent to the structure, and existing graded areas within the right-of-way.
  - d. Near Structure 17-1, crews and vehicles shall stay on existing access roads.
  - e. In the event of archaeological discoveries or discoveries of human remains during ground-disturbing activities, these activities must cease in the immediate vicinity of the discovery and Western's archaeologist (602-605-2842) must be notified immediately. If human remains are found on federal lands, the federal land-managing agency must also be notified immediately, followed by written notification of the discovery of human remains to the agency with 24 hours. Western's archaeologist, and the federal land managing agency's archaeologist, will consult with the California SHPO and tribes to determine the appropriate course of action.
2. Consultation will continue under National Historic Preservation Act. To date, no significant properties have been identified by Tribes in the Area of Potential Effect.

## C. Compliance

1. Prevention of Air Pollution: Per California Air Resources Board (CARB) requirements, all diesel equipment used within California borders to be is CARB compliant. All *off-road* diesel vehicles need to be registered under Diesel Off-road On-line Reporting System (DOORS) and all *on-road* diesel vehicles need to be registered under Truck and Bus Reporting (TRUCRS) before entering California. ***Failure to register vehicles in these*** databases can result in a fine.
2. Treated Wood Utility Poles and Cross Arms Recycling or Disposal: Whenever practicable, treated wood utility poles and cross arms removed during the project shall be recycled or transferred to the public for some uses.
  - a. Treated wood utility poles and cross arms transferred to a recycler, landfill, or the public shall be accompanied by a written consumer information sheet for treated wood as provided by Western. Obtain a receipt, part of the consumer information sheet, from the recipient indicating that they have received, read, and understand the

- consumer information sheet. Treated wood products transferred to right-of-way landowners shall be moved off the right-of-way.
- b. Treated wood product scrap, poles, and cross arms that cannot be donated or reused shall be properly disposed in a landfill that accepts treated wood and has signed Western's consumer information sheet receipt.
  - c. Submit treated wood utility poles and cross arms consumer information receipts to DSW Environmental Office.

Checklist for Categorical Exclusion Determination, revised Nov. 2011

<b>Application of Categorical Exclusions (1021.410)</b>	Disagree	Agree	Unknown
(b)(1) The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in appendix A or B to subpart D.		X	
(b)(2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal, including, but not limited to, scientific controversy about the environmental effects of the proposal; uncertain effects or effects involving unique or unknown risks; and unresolved conflicts concerning alternate uses of available resources		X	
(b)(3) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. Segmentation can occur when a proposal is broken down into small parts in order to avoid the appearance of significance of the total action. The scope of a proposal must include the consideration of connected and cumulative actions, that is, the proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or § 1021.211 of this part concerning limitations on actions during EIS preparation.		X	
<b>B. Conditions that are Integral Elements of the Classes of Actions in Appendix B. :</b>	NO	YES	UNKNOWN
(1) Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.	X		
(2) Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities;	X		
(3) Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases;	X		
(4) Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order, statute, or regulation by Federal, state, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to:	X		
(i) Property (such as sites, buildings, structures, and objects) of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance designated by a Federal, state, or local government, or	X		



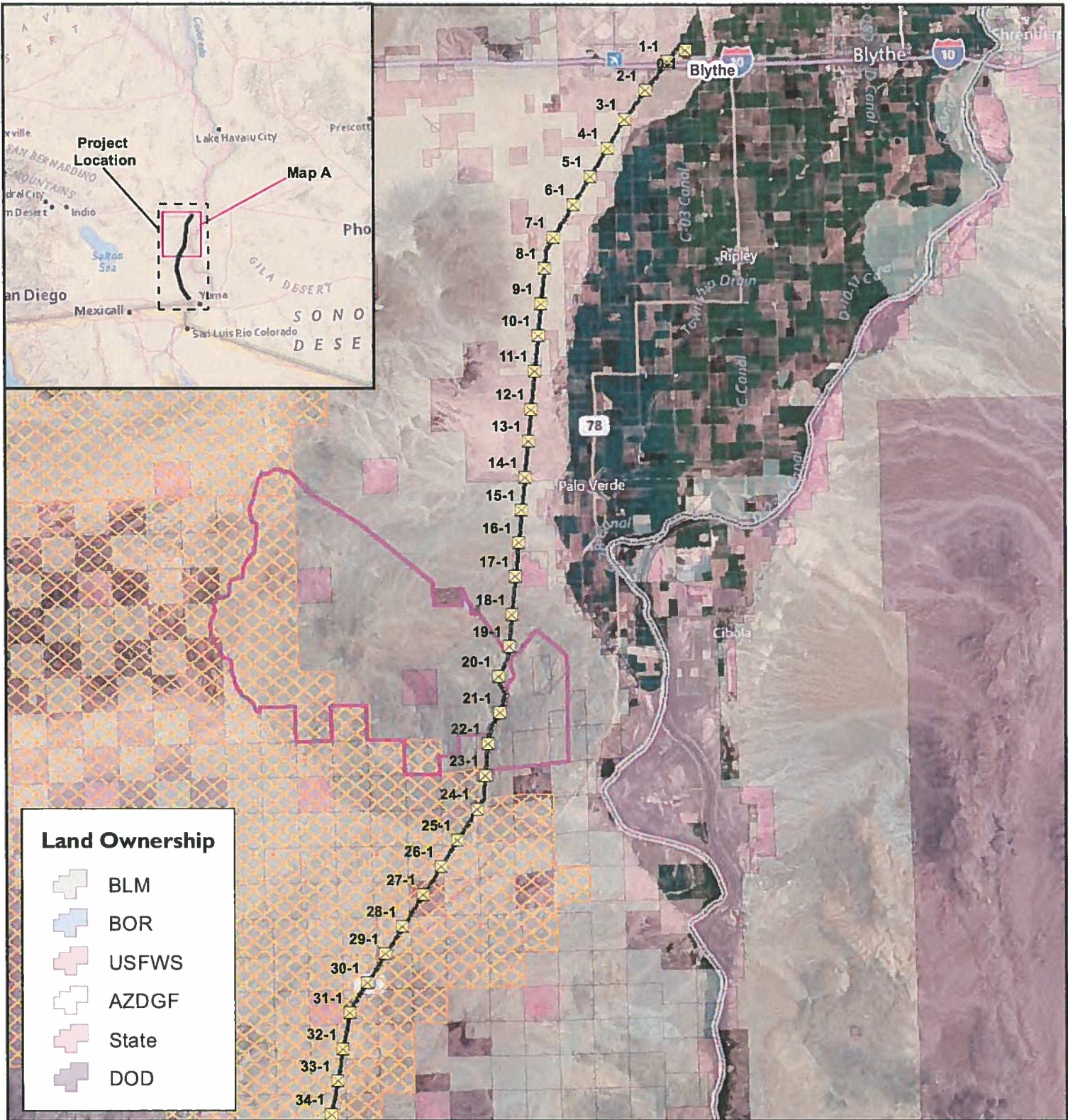
	property determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places;			
(ii)	Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat (including critical habitat) or Federally- proposed or candidate species or their habitat (Endangered Species Act); state-listed or state-proposed endangered or threatened species or their habitat; Federally-protected marine mammals and Essential Fish Habitat (Marine Mammal Protection Act; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act); and otherwise Federally-protected species (such as under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act or the Migratory Bird Treaty Act);	X		
(iii)	Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, —Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);	X		
(iv)	Areas having a special designation such as Federally- and state-designated wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national natural landmarks, wild and scenic rivers, state and Federal wildlife refuges, scenic areas (such as National Scenic and Historic Trails or National Scenic Areas), and marine sanctuaries;	X		
(v)	Prime or unique farmland, or other farmland of statewide or local importance, as defined at 7 CFR 658.2(a), —Farmland Protection Policy Act: Definitions,   or its successor;	X		
(vi)	Special sources of water (such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources that are vital in a region); and	X		
(vii)	Tundra, coral reefs, or rain forests.; or	X		
(5)	Involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.	X		

**Table 1. List of Structures Receiving Routine Maintenance,  
Blythe-Knob 161-kV Transmission Line**

Structure #	Pole Replacement	Pad Work	X-Arm, X-Brace, Cut Loose Ground, Insulators, Armor Rod Repair, Vegetation Management
0-4	X		
1-5	X	X	X
1-7			X
2-4			X
2-6			X
3-4			X
3-8	X		
4-6			X
5-3			X
6-2			X
6-4			X
9-2			X
10-8	X		
11-5			X
12-3			X
13-5	X		
14-1	X	X	X
14-3			X
14-6	X		X
14-8			X
16-4			X
17-7			X
18-5	X		X
20-1			X
20-5			X
20-6	X	X	
20-8		X	X
21-2			X
21-5	X	X	
21-8			X
22-1			X
22-2			X
22-7			X
23-3			X
23-4			X
23-5			X
23-6			X
23-9			X

Structure #	Pole Replacement	Pad Work	X-Arm, X-Brace, Cut Loose Ground, Insulators, Armor Rod Repair, Vegetation Management
24-1			X
24-2			X
24-5			X
24-6			X
25-1	X		
25-3			X
25-4			X
27-3			X
29-4			X
30-1			X
30-2	X	X	
30-4			X
31-2			X
31-5			X
32-3			X
32-5			X
34-5			X
36-3			X
37-2			X
37-4			X
38-1	X		
38-2			X
38-4			X
38-6			X
38-7			X
39-1			X
39-3			X
39-6			X
39-7			X
41-3			X
41-5			X
43-1		X	X
43-4	X		
43-5			X
44-2		X	
44-4			X
44-6		X	X
45-6			X
45-7			X
46-1			X
46-3			X
46-6			X

Structure #	Pole Replacement	Pad Work	X-Arm, X-Brace, Cut Loose Ground, Insulators, Armor Rod Repair, Vegetation Management
47-2			X
47-3		X	X
47-5			X
47-7			X
48-3			X
48-4			X
48-5			X
48-8			X
49-1			X
49-7			X
50-2			X
50-5			X
51-3			X
51-5			X
52-1			X
52-4			X
53-4			X
53-6			X
54-3			X
54-7			X
55-4			X
57-2	X		X
57-3	X	X	X
58-3	X		
58-6			X
59-6	X		
60-2			X
61-6	X		
62-4	X		
62-7	X		X
62-8	X		X
63-2			X
63-5			X
63-6			X
63-7			X



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Western review required before public release.

Name/Org: DSW Date: 11/13/2012

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Source: DSW, Aspen EG, ESRI

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Structures \*

Tline

Facilities

BLM Palo Verde Mountains Wilderness Area

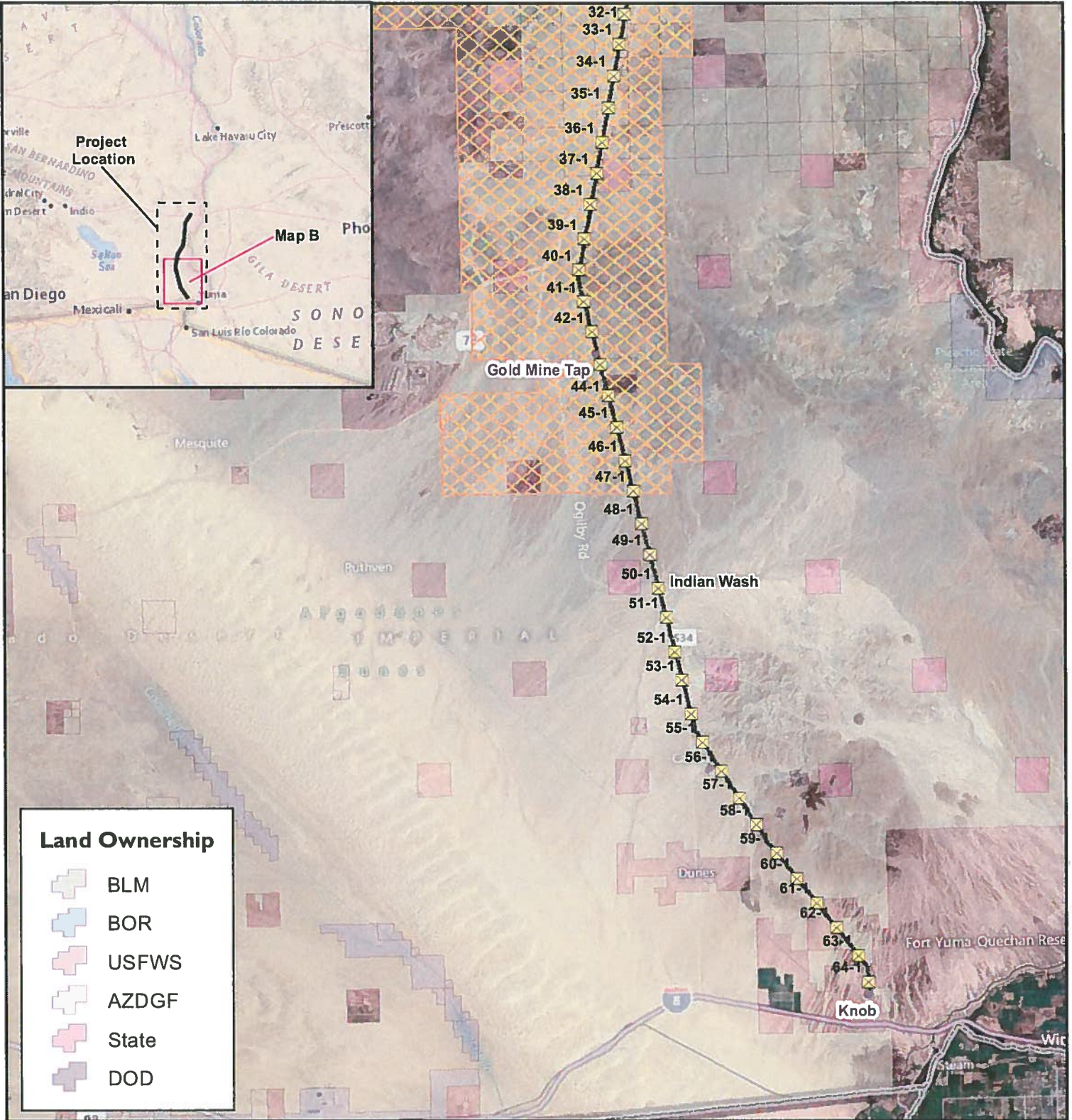
Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat

**Figure 1A - Overview Map  
BLY - KNB  
Maintenance Project**

\*Only first structure of each mile indicated.

1 in = 4 miles





**Land Ownership**

- BLM
- BOR
- USFWS
- AZDGF
- State
- DOD

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Source: DSW, Aspen EG, ESRI

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- Structures \*
- Tline
- Facilities
- BLM Palo Verde Mountains Wilderness Area
- Desert Tortoise Critical Habitat

\*Only first structure of each mile indicated.

**Figure 1B - Overview Map  
BLY - KNB  
Maintenance Project**

1 in = 4 miles

