

The first draft of the Environmental Assessment contains a number of errors, omissions and inadequacies which must be addressed prior to any decision-making.

1.1 PURPOSE AND NEED

1. The stated Purpose of the BLM, to give the Applicant an opportunity to construct, is predecisional and presumptuous. The purpose is to engage in the NEPA process to determine IF the applicant should be given that opportunity.
2. The BLM demonstrates need in Subsection 1.1.1 by merely directing the reader to authorization to consider the project under applicable statutes, regulations, and internal agency memoranda. The need for the BLM to approve this project is not adequately described and is separate and distinct from the commercial needs of the Applicant.
 - a. The EA should be revised to include the BLM's need for the project above and beyond their authorization and obligation to consider it.
 - b. The EA should explain why the BLM needs to consider a facility intended to serve areas within the Caltrans ROW and outside of BLM jurisdiction, yet the EA fails to evaluate alternatives within the Caltrans ROW that would more effectively meet the stated purpose.
3. As described in Section 1.1.2, the Applicant's desires to expand their broadband network to "offload wireless data to land-based fiber-optic infrastructure and provide redundant support via microwave" to the existing communication sites in Yucca Valley and Desert Hot Springs must be balanced by the needs of the public. The public benefits are not sufficiently described or quantified in the EA to overcome the potential consequences.
4. The EA fails to address the needs of the public. The community's needs for broadband are being met as service availability rapidly expands.
 - a. Morongo Valley already has a tall communications tower. The County Board of Supervisors approved funding in March 2022 for the CSA 70 TV-2 Tower Replacement Project, which will construct a new tower to accommodate multi-tenants serving the needs of the community. The County has also issued a lease to Pacific Lightwave to provide broadband service at the current facility. The Applicant may wish to bid on the CSA 70 Tower Replacement Project as an alternative to the current location.
 - b. Construction of a wireless distribution facility by Pacific Lightwave began on a nearby and taller hill in June 2024 (parcel 058410335), providing additional coverage to the community not yet reflected on FCC broadband mapping.
 - c. . Earlier this year, SpaceX launched its first direct-to-phone satellites, designed to provide cell service anywhere in the world and help eliminate cellular dead zones. Described as "a cellphone tower in space," this service will soon render terrestrial solutions unnecessary in remote locations.
 - d. With the needs of the community already being met by the aforementioned projects located off BLM-administered lands, the only problem that remains is the

underserved segment of Highway 62 in the Morongo Grade. Current cell phones have SOS capabilities, which allow users to text emergency services via satellite even if they cannot connect to a cellular or wifi network. These services are currently available on the Morongo Grade. The authority of the BLM to address other perceived deficiencies in emergency communications within transportation corridors remains questionable.

5. In Section 1.1.3, the proposed Actions and LUPA cannot be justified under the guise of EO No. 13985 because the Morongo Valley community does not meet the definitions of “underserved”.
 - a. [FCC National Broadband Map](#), updated 8/6/2024, indicates 100% coverage for Mobile Broadband in the community of Morongo Valley and classifies the community as “Served” with respect to Fixed Broadband.
 - b. The definition of “Underserved” cited on Page 1-4 references communities that have been systematically denied opportunities, exemplified by inequity. Yet later in the EA on Page 3-38, it’s stated that the community does not meet the criteria for environmental justice concern.
 - c. The unserved segment of Highway 62 in the Morongo Grade is located within the Caltrans right-of-way, which is arguably the most appropriate location for wireless infrastructure improvements, not on BLM lands within a Served community. Further, the applicant makes no guarantee that the proposed tower will effectively reach all areas of the Morongo Grade, where topographical challenges prevent signal transmission down to the highway at the bottom of a steep and winding canyon.
6. The LUPA Purpose and Need stated in Subsection 1.1.3 cites the Administration’s goal of creating union jobs, per E.O. No. 13985. However, the EA fails to demonstrate how the Project will advance this goal. The estimated construction workforce is only 4 people for a 45-day duration, and the Applicant has not committed to hiring union labor.

1.4 LAND USE PLAN CONFORMANCE

1. While the EA acknowledges that the project is located within a 0.5-mi proximity to the Sand to Snow National Monument boundary and the Big Morongo ACEC, it should also be noted that the Sand to Snow National Monument entirely encompasses the community of Morongo Valley and thus the project site.
2. The EA should include the definition of Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) provided by the DRECP LUPA, p. xxii:

Designation on BLM-administered lands that are recognized and managed for their recreation opportunities, unique value and importance. SRMAs are high-priority areas for outdoor recreation as defined in the BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1 (2005). It is a public lands unit identified in land use plans to direct recreation funding and personnel to manage for a specific set of recreation activities, experiences, opportunities and benefits. Both land use plan decisions and subsequent implementing actions for recreation in each SRMA are geared to a strategically identified primary market— destination, community, or undeveloped areas.

3. In quoting the overarching goals of the SRMA, the EA fails to also include the following applicable goals and objectives pertaining to SRMA management, which can be found in the DRECP LUPA on p. 82:

Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA). Protect SRMAs for their unique/special recreation values. Manage SRMAs for their targeted recreation activities, experiences and benefits. Maintain (and where possible enhance) the recreation setting characteristics – physical components of remoteness, naturalness and facilities; social components of contact, group size and evidence of use; and operational components of access, visitor services and management controls (refer to recreation setting characteristics matrix). Refer to the individual SRMA Special Unit Management Plans for SRMA/Recreation Management Zone specific objectives, management actions, and allowable uses.

4. Through the omission of these BLM policies, the EA implies that these lands are being treated as General Public Lands despite the fact that they're located within the Sand to Snow SRMA. The BLM has identified and designated these lands as a SRMA with the DRECP; therefore, it is not appropriate to treat these lands as GPLs.
5. In order to establish Land Use Plan conformance, the EA should evaluate the appropriateness of the Proposed Action in relation to the applicable CMAs rather than broadly stating all CMAs will be addressed in the Appendix E, Applicant Proposed Measures.
6. The EA's claim that the Proposed Action addresses all applicable CMAs cannot be substantiated because some CMAs are not adequately addressed by applicant-proposed measures. See examples in applicable Chapter 3 subsections below.
7. The Sand to Snow National Monument management plan is currently being developed. The proclamation to designate Sand to Snow states, "The lands administered by BLM shall be managed as a unit of the National Landscape Conservation System, pursuant to applicable legal authorities." The BLM website page on National Landscape Conservation System, offers history and links to the DRECP and states, "Phase II of the DRECP will focus on better aligning local, state, and federal renewable energy development and conservation plans, policies, and goals." Community plans stating a strong desire to maintain a rural lifestyle and preserve the landscape were ignored. Local and County Government comments were not responded to.
8. National Landscape Conservation System webpage ends with, "The BLM is still evaluating how to manage the National Conservation Lands of the California Desert and how to subdivide these areas into specific units. This page will be updated with further information when it is available." How can BLM degrade a VRM when other plans have yet to be adopted, which purportedly are directed to preserve the landscape and give weight to community plans and local governments?

1.6 PLANNING AND RESOURCE ISSUES

1. Wildfire risk was a concern raised by the community during the Public Scoping period, but it is not addressed in the EA. The proposed project has a potential to increase the wildfire risk in an already very high fire hazard and wind-prone area due to the:
 - a. inclusion of 3,000 gal of fuel storage near homes;
 - b. 196' tall tower as an obstacle to air support during a wildfire;
 - c. far distance to an existing fire hydrant - over 1500' host pull from Matzene and Manana;
 - d. scarcity of resources (personnel, water, pressure); and
 - e. likely increase in unauthorized OHV.
2. Below photographs from Hess Fire on May 15, 2024 show low-flying aircraft and proposed project site from the same stationary vantage point at Conejo Rd/Hess Blvd;



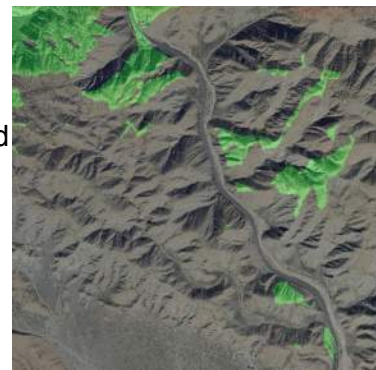
Panorama from Hess Fire (above) and with Google Earth overlay representing height of tower as yellow line (below), based on tower coordinates of 34°2'29.69"N, 116°35'47.71"W and height at 3054' AMSL, demonstrating the potential for tower to interfere with aerial support during fire suppression efforts

3. Public safety benefits of improved emergency access to cell service are touted throughout the EA but not evaluated in relation to the potential public safety impacts due to an increase in fire hazard in close proximity to a residential neighborhood.
 - a. The project's potential to save lives by reducing emergency response times is overstated and fails to mention other obstacles to access which exist on the Morongo Grade, such as bottlenecks without shoulders and lack of safe pull-outs.

- b. There is no current data presented in EA to substantiate the claim that response times would decrease or to quantify the lives lost within cellular dead-zones.
- 4. The unknown health risks associated with a multi-tenant tower near homes was a concern raised but excluded from further discussion in the EA.
 - a. No scientific evidence has been presented to prove no adverse health effects will be imposed on nearby residents due to long-term exposure to RF radiation.
 - b. No mitigation measures have been proposed to overcome or insure against the potential risks.

2.2 PROPOSED ACTION

1. No rationale is given for a single-tower solution as opposed to a multi-site solution with lesser aggregate footprint.
2. Site Map in Appendix A, Figure 2-1 is outdated and inconsistent with Figure LS-1, Site and Access Survey provided in Appendix B.
3. The Site Map / Survey should indicate existing topography over the entire project area, grading limits, and locations of hvac equipment or other sources of noise.
4. In the absence of a grading plan to establish the total impact area, the APE in Table 2-1 is understated and inaccurate due to the omission of manufactured slopes.
5. Appendix B, Area Map points to a “Preferred Alternative” tower location near Highway 62 which was not evaluated in the EA.
6. The Appendix C Propagation Studies used to justify the proposed project are inadequate and do not clearly present the data in a manner that informs the public and decision makers.
 - a. Propagation maps are un-dated but referenced in a November 2022 document by ICT. A two-year-old study should not be considered current as a baseline representing existing conditions. Even the Tower Source exhibit has the date cropped out in the lower right.
 - b. Propagation maps are too low in resolution, so it’s impossible to tell the signal strength down at the elevation of the highway at the bottom of a canyon. New exhibits should be provided with sufficient level of detail to confirm sufficient coverage at the level of motorists within the unserved areas of Morongo Grade.
 - c. There is no explanation of what the colored values represent in the legend nor what signal strength is needed for emergency responders to reliably pinpoint a motorist’s location.
 - d. Explain how the tower would be able to transmit a reliable signal without a direct line of sight down to the highway within Morongo Grade, as demonstrated by Viewshed Analysis in Appendix I. The highway would largely be within the geometric shadow cast by the winding, steep slopes of the canyon, as indicated by the lack of green shading over the highway.



7. The Description of Components in Appendix D is lacking information about the quantity and types of broadband and cellular which the facility is intended for, frequencies, power, and other data.

2.4 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED

1. The EA dismisses any alternatives located within designated Wilderness Areas but fails to explain why co-location in existing rights of way would not be permissible if they result in no additional environmental impacts.
2. The EA fails to explain why co-location on existing poles within the Caltrans ROW is not feasible for the Applicant, yet the feasibility of other alternatives not located on BLM-administered lands are evaluated in greater detail. For instance, in Appendix C, the Applicant provided a Propagation Map for the existing County tower site in order to eliminate it as an alternative, but no such map was provided for any other alternatives. Although a solution may not be within the authority of BLM to implement, it could still be presented as a viable alternative to meet the need which would be pursued by the Applicant or others with the appropriate agencies.
3. The EA fails to mention that BLM owns the land under which at least some of the Edison poles are located, as evidenced by BLM Case Serial Numbers CACA106280901 and CACA10601363.
 - a. Collocation on Edison poles should have been discussed in EA section 2.4.
 - i. If BLM considers themselves to be “managing” ROWs that they grant on their land, then this belongs in section 2.4.1.1 titled “Alternative Locations on BLM-managed Lands.”
 - ii. If BLM does not consider themselves to be “managing” ROWs that they grant on their land, then a new subsection titled “Alternative Locations on BLM-owned but not BLM-managed Lands.”
 - b. When asked why Edison poles were not utilized, the reply from BLM was, “*The proponent is not seeking an easement with Edison at this time, due to the solar arrays component that would provide energy which is now included with the proposed action*”. It is unclear:
 - i. Why Edison poles were not an alternative discussed but were eliminated from consideration. It is also unclear why Edison power could not be used.
 - ii. Why a lower impact site (along an existing road, flatter topography, by a fiber optic line, etc.) for a small solar array such as that discussed in Alternative B was not proposed. Electricity generated from solar could be sold to Edison and bought back down the line from Edison at collocated sites. Any other ancillary facilities could also be placed by the solar arrays in a lower impact area.
 - iii. Why other creative options such as that listed in subpoint *ii* did not emerge during agency review of public scoping comments and subsequent writing of the EA.

4. No explanation was provided for why co-location within existing utility ROWs on BLM land is not viable, yet co-location within the proposed new ICT ROW would be encouraged.
5. A greater effort should have been made to identify rights of way or facilities that could be upgraded as an alternative.
6. EA states that residential zoned lands will not provide the line of sight needed for wireless broadband; however, Pacific Lightwave recently installed broadband distribution on a higher-elevation hill near the project site (APN 058410335) to serve Morongo Valley residents and businesses.
7. In section 1.1.2 of the EA, it is discussed that the identified site is the only place in Morongo Valley where the applicant could broadcast above 1000 watts.
 - a. There is no explanation of what makes other sites unsuitable for this purpose. What limitations are in place elsewhere to prevent broadcast above 1000 watts?
 - b. Was the need to broadcast above 1000 watts one of the reasons why no other alternatives were chosen?
 - i. If the wattage requirement is one of the reasons why there were no alternative locations selected, then this fact should have been discussed in EA section 2.4. It makes all reasons given for eliminating alternative locations very misleading.

3.1 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

1. Table 3-1 lists the Special Status Species with potential to occur in the project vicinity. Though not observed by biologists during surveys, evidence of the following species have been recorded by residents in the vicinity, demonstrating the existence of an active wildlife corridor between Dry Morongo Creek, the project site, and Big Morongo Canyon Preserve and emphasizing the value of this land to native wildlife:



Desert tortoise
5-1-2024
49010 Mockingbird Ln
Distance 0.34 mi



Desert tortoise
5-18-2024
49010 Mockingbird Ln
Distance 0.34 mi



Desert tortoise
6-17-2023
48728 Park Ave
Distance 0.63 mi



Desert tortoise
5-22-2024
48728 Park Ave
Distance 0.63 mi



Cooper's hawk
10-11-2021
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



Mountain lion
9-1-2024
Adeline Wy/Mockingbird Ln
Distance 1.00 mi



Bobcat
9-3-2024
48283 Adeline Wy
Distance 0.85 mi



Bobcat
6-17-2022
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



American badger
6-22-2024
10649 Malibu Trail
Distance 2.27 mi



Desert tortoise burrow
3-16-2022
34°2'27.3"N, 116°35'44.5"W
Distance 0.03 mi



Great horned owl
8-24-2024
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



Roadrunner
7-23-2024
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



Black bear
7-24-2022
49224 Matzene Dr
Distance 0.31 mi



Banded gecko
6-9-2021
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



Bighorn sheep
1-10-2016
Hwy 62 in Morongo Grade
Distance 0.91 mi



Rosy boa
7-23-2024
11568 Pinon Ave
Distance 0.14 mi



Mule deer
9-18-2020
47750 Mockingbird Ln
1.51 mi



Fox
9-1-2018
47750 Mockingbird Ln
1.51 mi



Checkerspot butterfly
4-11-2017
49010 Mockingbird Ln
Distance 0.34 mi



Bats
7-23-2020
48519 Park Ave
Distance 0.64 mi



Red diamondback rattlesnake
9-11-2023
48519 Park Ave
Distance 0.64 mi

2. Concerns about bats were raised during the scoping period, yet no bat survey was conducted to assess the potential impacts. Their ongoing presence within the study area is well-known among many neighboring residents.
3. Biological surveys do not specify time of day. Daytime photographs provided in Appendix E, Biology Report, suggest that surveys may not sufficiently account for presence of nocturnal wildlife.
4. Current records and citations should expand upon the Biological Surveys. The San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society (SBVAS) Chapter classifies the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve area as an Important Bird Area, “Avian use of the IBA is remarkable, and has been well known to ornithologists for decades. Its breeding bird community is unique and exceptionally rich, with over 70 nesting species documented from just a few hundred acres of habitat.

Long-term research into the breeding bird diversity, mainly by Gene Cardiff of the San Bernardino Co. Museum of Natural History, has estimated densities of more than 1,400 territories per square kilometer, one of the densest concentrations in North America. It currently boasts one of the largest populations of Brown-crested Flycatchers and Summer Tanagers in the state. The Federally-Endangered Least Bell’s Vireos historically breed at BMCP. eBird data shows that Long-eared Owl has maintained a small breeding population within the willow forest for many years, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo has graced the IBA several times in past decades, suggesting it may be at least prospecting for breeding locations. Other riparian

obligates such as Yellow-breasted Chat nest in strong numbers both at the preserve and at Covington Park, with Vermilion Flycatchers nearly restricted to the latter site. This region (western Little San Bernardino Mtns.) is to be a contact zone between desert and coastal species (e.g., both Ladder-backed and Nuttall's Woodpecker, as well as hybrids, occur). During spring, songbirds migrating north through the state from the Colorado Desert stop here in huge numbers, particularly in late April, when there can be hundreds of flycatchers, warblers, tanagers and orioles at the oasis. Fall migration is more subdued, but can be impressive in September.”

5. Records from Christmas Bird Counts at Big Morongo Canyon Preserve in the last 5 yrs illustrate a “trend of declining numbers of birds. In other words aggregate totals for individual bird species and overall counts and field surveys seem to be declining over time.” The EA fails to consider this cumulative impact of the proposed project on declining bird populations which are already threatened by the shrinking marshlands, as documented by Big Morongo Canyon Preserve Christmas Birds Counts as well as the Joshua Tree Christmas Bird Counts conducted by the SBVAS.
6. There is no analysis of the impact of operational noise on animals. Being a rural community, many properties nearby raise animals. Additionally, the project contains habitat for sensitive species and migratory birds. The potential impact of noise on wildlife needs to be disclosed.
7. The EA fails to address the potential impacts of solar arrays on migrating birds attracted to the project site due to confusing the reflective panels as water bodies.
8. No mitigations for solar panels or bird strike were addressed.
9. The EA fails to address the impact of a new, un-paved access road resulting in an increase in OHV traffic and consequently the increase in non-native species. OHV can easily circumvent the proposed access gate at Canyon House, and the BLM has demonstrated a history of their inability to protect public lands from OHV access.
10. Appendix E APMs cite the USFWS BMPs rather than actual Applicant Proposed Measures. Siting BMPs for new towers have not been met.
11. DRECP CMA LUPA-BIO-12 provides no specific measures to monitor or enforce CMAs to prevent impact from noise on special status species. Mitigation measures for noise should state definitively what will be done to leave no room for interpretation, i.e. "The Applicant shall locate stationary noise sources XX feet away from special status species or suitable habitat".
12. DRECP CMA LUPA-BIO-16 cannot be met entirely, as stated, due to proposed project siting within known bird and bat feeding areas, lack of co-location, and lack of compatible fencing.
13. DRECP CMA LUPA-BIO-VEG-1 and 5 should cite the current BLM standards for management of cactus, yucca, and succulents at time of writing to ensure the project is able to comply.
14. DRECP CMA SRMA-VEG-1 incorrectly mentions an OHV Open Area, but project parcels are in an area with limited OHV access, with no designated routes.
15. Appendix F, Biology Report, Section 4.4.5 incorrectly states the site is currently only 2% vegetated. Vegetation communities have recovered significantly since the 2016 and 2021 surveys.



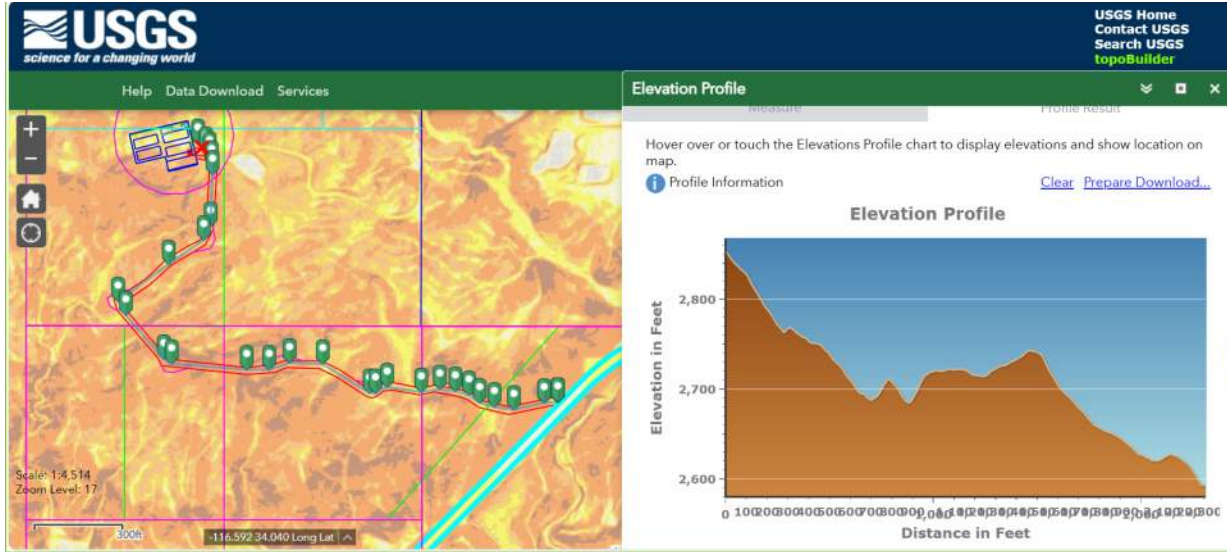
11-6-2023, from 11568 Pinon Ave looking west with project site located on top of ridge

3.2 CULTURAL RESOURCES

1. Cultural resources survey was conducted in September 2016 and therefore does not evaluate the current design and access road nor the current status of cultural significance of the site and surrounding areas.
2. Local historians within the Morongo Basin weren't utilized. The historic Morongo Valley Inn located within ½ mi is absent from discussion, among other cultural assets which may be impacted.

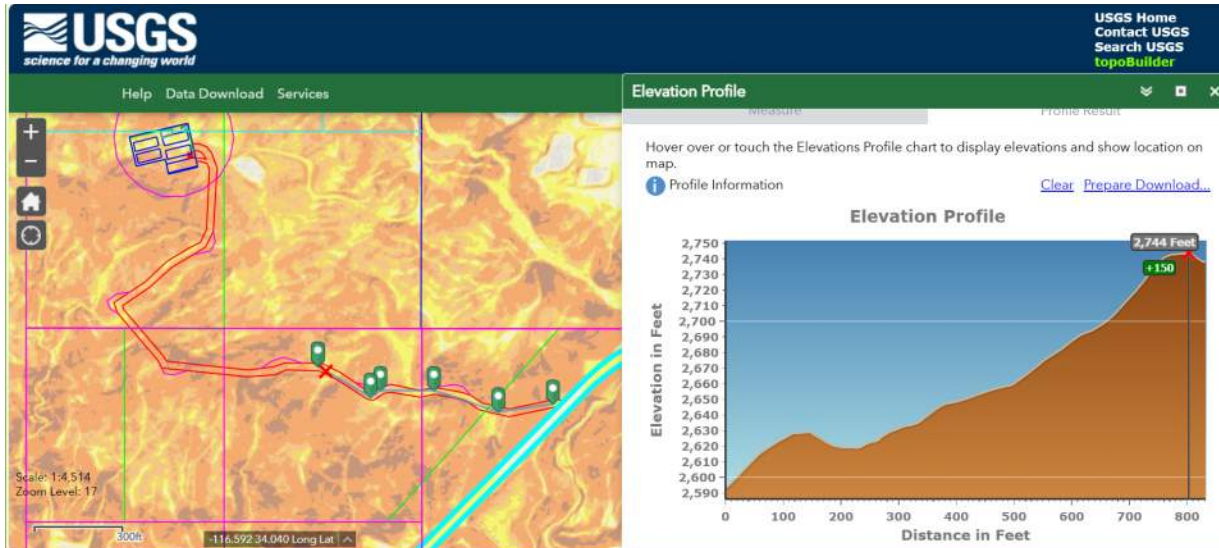
3.4 SOIL RESOURCES

1. No slope analysis or geologic study has been provided to inform the road alignment, grading plan, impact analysis, or proposed mitigation/remediation measures.
2. Environmental Assessment Section 3.3 discusses geologic information, including exposed materials. Can that information be integrated in the discussion of soils in section 3.4. More information could be acquired this way, because section 3.4 only uses information on soils found some distance from Proposed Action.
3. Environmental Assessment Section 3.4 says that the project area* "likely" contains soil units which are similar to those found 2000 feet south. "Likely" is conjecture, not fact.
4. Table 3-2 in Environmental Assessment Section 3.4 mentions slopes of 5-15%. It is unclear from the document which slopes are being referred to. Are they the slopes in the area 2000 feet south of the Project Area, are they the slopes within the Project Area*?
5. Table 3-2 in Environmental Assessment Section 3.4 mentions slopes of 5-15%. The slopes within the proposed ROW were measured to be up to 33 %. These slopes were measured several different ways:

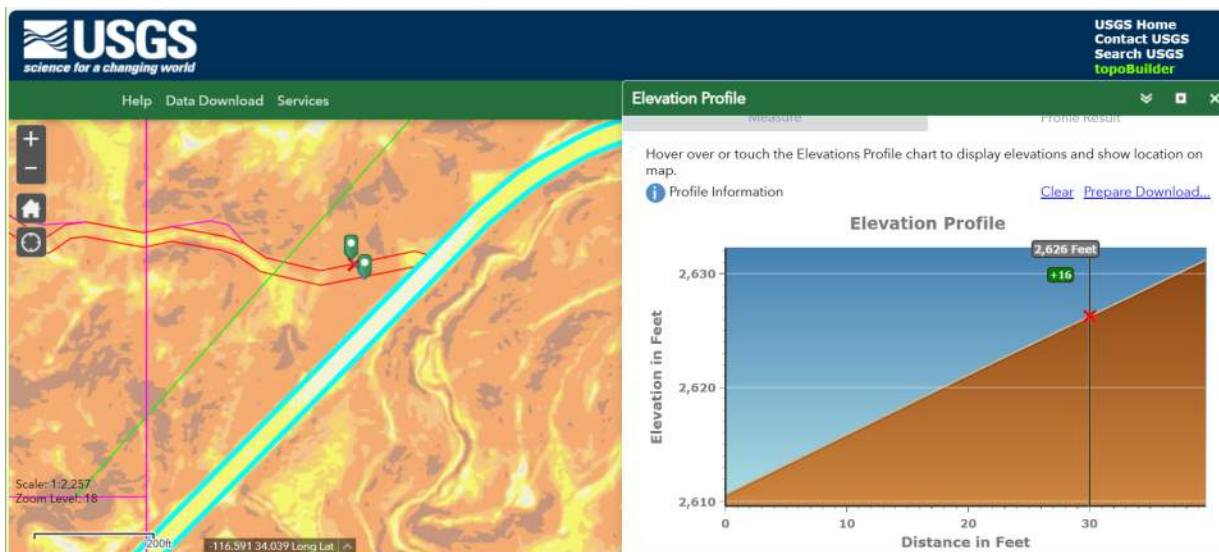


Above: USGS National Map Viewer (<https://apps.nationalmap.gov/viewer/>) overlaid with the KMZ file provided by BLM. Also shown is the "Slope Map" layer from the USGS map, set at 50% transparency. The layer description says of Slope Map: "This server-side function will apply an on-the-fly process to the input elevation data to generate a color visualization of slope, where flat surfaces are gray, shallow slopes are yellow, and steep slopes are red-brown." The Elevation Profile tool was used to map the elevation of the proposed access road. This was mapped from the proposed tower site down to canyon house, so the slope direction aligns with the map.

The proposed tower site is 262 feet higher than the proposed road start at Canyon House. The proposed access road would be about 2,347 feet long. If we averaged this slope, it is about 1 foot gain per 11 feet of road, or 11% grade. However, we can see that the slope is not constant. If we map from Canyon House just a bit up the proposed ROW, we see that the ROW would gain 33 feet within the first 100 feet from Canyon House Rd. and about 150 feet within the first 800 feet from Canyon House Rd (see figure below). This is a 33% and 18.75% slope, respectively. This slope is just what the road will cross, which is not necessarily the steepest slope direction. The steepest slopes are over 50%.



Above: the same map layers as the other USGS map, but with the elevation profile taken the opposite direction as the proposed ROW direction.



Above: the same map layers. This time, the slope was taken across the proposed ROW to show an example of slope steepness along where the ROW is proposed to be built.

6. Section 3.4 does not address soil runoff. It says that "potential effects to soil resources would be limited only to areas where these activities would occur," which does not address soil effects as a direct result of grading. Manufactured slopes are often steeper than the natural condition, which would increase the potential for runoff.
7. Decreased water infiltration as a result of soil compaction is not addressed in the EA.
8. Increased water channelization is not addressed in this section or in the EA in general. Despite the steep slopes, water channelization does not presently occur along proposed ROW, but will likely occur from the following: access road and lease area drainage, increased slopes, slope cut and fill, and soil compaction. This is a non-exhaustive list. The BLM is or should be aware of this potential issue given that it was raised in public

scoping. Even if this issue is eliminated for analysis, this resource issue should be mentioned.

9. Applicant Proposed Measures (APMs) subsection only discusses how BMPs would "reduce construction-caused soil effects". Clarify the definition of "construction-caused" and whether it refers to any effect which can be connected to the construction or whether it only addresses the construction phase. Modification of this subsection is necessary to clearly and accurately describe the effects that the APMs would reduce.
10. How large is the expected disturbance area if slope cut and fill are included? If an area is not re-vegetated within a couple of years, it is considered a disturbance.
11. The "Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative" subsection says that the project site would "remain to have ... a high potential for drought soil conditions". This statement suggests that the proposed project may provide some benefit to alleviate the drought conditions, which is inaccurate and should be rephrased or omitted.

3.5 SPECIAL AREA DESIGNATIONS

1. The EA does not discuss the impact of Land Withdrawal on recreation activities intended for the Sand to Snow SRMA.
 - a. Land Withdrawal is defined in The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA 43 USC 1702(j)) as: "withholding an area of Federal land from settlement, sale, location, or entry, under some or all of the general land laws, for the purpose of limiting activities under those laws in order to maintain other public values in the area or reserving the area for a particular public purpose or program; or transferring jurisdiction over an area of Federal land, other than "property" governed by the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act from one department, bureau or agency to another department, bureau or agency."
 - b. Fencing off a portion of the Project Area so that it is off-limits to recreation is a form of land withdrawal. This land closure is legal closure to entry, and is entirely different from a parcel being closed to entry by vehicles.
 - c. The EA clearly shows that at least a portion of the proposed Project Area would be fenced off near the peak of a scenic ridgeline where trails currently exist, negatively affecting the quality of an area available for primary activities. Therefore, the amount and impact of Land Withdrawal to recreation areas must be thoroughly described.
2. 43 USC 1714 discusses how land may be withdrawn. The Proposed Action would fall under subchapter (d) "Withdrawals aggregating less than five thousand acres; procedure applicable". 43 USC 1714 (h) says that new withdrawals including those falling under subsection (d) shall not be put into place until after a public hearing. It is assumed that if withdrawal is being proposed to take place, a public hearing which explicitly identifies withdrawal as one of the conditions of this project will occur.

3.6 NOISE

1. The Noise Analysis in Appendix H incorrectly describes the proposed operation as having electrical supplied by a utility easement and makes no mention of the solar arrays proposed in Alternative A. Furthermore, the analysis is based upon the operation of generators only when power is not available and for less than 20 minutes daily. This operation describes Alternative B, not the Applicant-Preferred Alternative A, which would rely on solar arrays with batteries backed-up for up to 6 hours each night. This significantly greater use of generators has the potential to be an ongoing nuisance during the most sensitive hours. Further, the increased use would result in more frequent refilling by fuel trucks, which is another source of noise and fire hazard. For these reasons alone, the entire noise analysis should be nullified and redone.
2. The Noise Analysis is based on noise modeling alone and not noise monitoring. Noise modeling is not sufficient for establishing baseline conditions.
 - a. Topography and terrain features affect how sound travels, which may not be taken into account in the noise analysis based solely on modeling.
 - b. Noise Study should be revised and recirculated to include data from noise monitoring.
 - c. Peak existing noise volumes are an unfair baseline because vehicular sources are generally fleeting whereas operational noise generated by the project would be more constant. Noise study should include ambient noise levels for comparison.
3. Not enough Sensitive Receptors were studied. Monitors should be located at several home sites, both vacant and occupied, as impacts to the human environment would extend into the future.
 - a. Table H-5 notes an incorrect distance to the Residence to the East of 792'. The actual distance is 430' to the property line and 698' to the structure .
 - b. The nearest Residence to the North of the project site is located a distance of 630' to property line and 730' to structure.
 - c. A vacant residential lot with a graded pad is located only 82' east of the project site. The noise impact to development potential of this residential lot is not evaluated.
 - d. The peak daytime noise reported at the single residential Sensitive Receptor located east of the tower site of 47 dB is not consistent with the actual conditions at that location. Actual noise is far quieter.
 - e. Other residences to the north and west, located farther from the highway, may have less ambient noise compared to residences to the east; thus, it cannot be concluded from the limited data provided that operational noise at the tower site will not exceed current ambient and peak volumes at any given residence.
4. Appendix H2 Noise Modeling and Calculations is absent and should be provided for public review.

3.7 VISUAL RESOURCES

1. Amending the RMP to downgrade the VRM class would undermine the land planning objectives which were [intended to protect our scenic values](#).

2. KOPs fail to adequately portray the scenic value of existing conditions.
 - a. KOPs with telephone poles in foreground downplay the degree of change considering an affected resident would be viewing from within their home or a scenic vantage point as opposed to from the street. KOPs should try to avoid angles with utility poles or other obstructions in the foreground.
 - b. KOPs 2, 3, and 9 crop out or obscure the views of Mt San Jacinto and thus downplay the value of existing scenery.
 - c. No KOPs depict the impact to views from east of the tower looking towards San Gorgonio, such as from San Gorgonio Ave, Matzene Dr, Rosewood Ave, and Canyon House Rd.
 - d. KOP 4 does not depict the access road, grading, fencing, and solar arrays when they would likely be visible.
 - e. KOPs 2, 3, 4, and 9 would potentially have strong form and line contrast (not moderate) with equipment installed.
3. Visual Simulations fail to accurately depict the proposed facility components, thereby misleading the public as well as decision makers on the actual visual impact:
 - a. The equipment of multiple users are not shown in simulations yet are provided in the design specs. Because they can be permitted by BLM without a NEPA process, the cumulative visual impact of co-location/subleasing must be evaluated at this stage. Colors of equipment should be specified.
 - b. Shadows cast by the tower and its associated transmission equipment are not shown.
 - c. The sloped metal roof of the 20' x 40' equipment building is not depicted, therefore the public cannot visualize the impact of glare or reflection.
 - d. The 8' tall fencing with barbed wire is absent from simulations. Encompassing a 25,000 square foot area, the fencing must not be disregarded.
4. Contrast Rating worksheets would likely have different results when all of the omitted components are considered, as the degree of contrast due to increased surface area would be stronger and potentially noncompliant with VRM Class III criteria.
5. Mitigation for the cumulative visual impact of equipment and other facility components (ie. camouflage or stealth towers) may not be possible or feasible.

3.8 ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

1. EA fails to evaluate the attributes which make our community thrive economically. Visual resources are more vital to MV socioeconomics than improving cell reception on a relatively short stretch of dangerous highway.
 - a. Properties nearest to the tower site are arguably more remote with fewer broadband options than properties located farther away from the tower where fixed services are more readily available. However, the EA presents a weak argument that declining property values nearest to the tower can be negated by the overall economic benefit of faster internet speeds. The examples given are incongruent: a potential property value decline of 10-19% nearest the tower is hardly equivalent to an overall increase in property values of \$230 - \$661,

especially considering the community is already served according to FCC Broadband Maps.

- i. MV median home price: \$330k x 161 homes within .75 km x 19% decline in value = **\$10M potential burden.**
 - ii. MV total housing units: 1,960 x \$661 increase in value = **\$1.3M potential benefit**
 - b. Declines in property values are likely to be more significant than reported because the EA only correlates proximity and visibility of communication towers without taking into account the degradation of valuable scenery. For many MV property owners, the scenic unobstructed views are the primary selling feature.
 - c. Agritourism and ecotourism will also be negatively affected as customers will be more difficult to attract with the degraded views.
 - d. Impact to property values is downplayed and cannot be justified by adding another tall tower to an adequately-served community.
 - e. No mitigation measures have been offered to overcome the potential economic impacts. The economic benefit claims are negligible, if any at all, since the homes nearest to the tower site (most vulnerable to significant decline) already have access to broadband.
 - f. BLM has not disclosed the revenue which the right-of-way grant stands to generate over the lease period.
2. EPA EJSscreen is outdated and not centered on correct project coordinates. Results must be updated per coordinates 34°2'29.69"N, 116°35'47.71"W and to reflect the most currently-available data.
- a. Environmental Justice Indicators are at or above 50 percentile for Ozone, NO₂, Lead, and Drinking Water Non-Compliance.
 - b. Socioeconomic Indicators are at or above 50 percentile for all categories.
 - c. Health Indicators are above the State average. The potential health risk posed by the project was not evaluated.
 - d. Wildfire risk is above State and National averages. The associated increased risk posed by the project is not evaluated but would likely be exacerbated by the project.
 - e. Broadband Internet is not identified as a critical service gap and thus not a need that the community should shoulder the burden of.
3. Per current EJSscreen report, six different EJ indexes exceed the national averages at the project site; therefore, Environmental Justice criteria for consideration should be met.
4. By definition, rural communities are deserving of "equity" per E.O. 13985, and the project will likely exacerbate the inequity by disproportionately burdening the population.

3.9 CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

1. The EA fails to acknowledge the impacts of the proposed equipment to be installed once the facility is subleased to multiple tenants. Tower design specs provided by the Applicant in Appendix B accommodate up to 8 tenants with 72 Panel Antennas at 8' x 1' and 6 H.P. Dishes at 6' diameter emitting 6 GHz each.

2. The EA is dismissive of potential cumulative impact of subsequent co-location of new facilities which may seek to locate along this right of way and scenic ridge.
 - a. Once the access road is constructed, a significant expense will no longer be necessary for future development proposals.
 - b. Amending the land plan and downgrading the VRM class could potentially result in more tall towers once the Project is constructed, as these actions pave the way for others to co-locate or gain access to this ridgeline without triggering the need for another plan amendment. The highest point on the tower is the most valuable and scarce, so other service providers may prefer to build their own facility than to sublease a lower position on this ICT tower. Wind turbines are another potential use.
3. The proposed actions will set a precedent that any Applicant can circumvent established resource protections for commercial pursuits by misappropriating Executive Orders and other federal agenda to justify plan amendments.
4. The EA inaccurately equates the impact of the Project on the solitude quality of wilderness to the cumulative impact of the future buildout of the community in accordance with the Comprehensive Plan.
 - a. Unlike gradual rural residential development and low-lying highway-oriented commercial growth, the proposed project would not adhere to the [Morongo Valley Community Action Guide](#) which seeks to preserve the rural character and natural environment.
 - b. The potential impacts to the solitude quality of wilderness are arguably greater with the industrial character of a 196' tall tower and 25,000 sf barbed-wire-enclosed compound located on a scenic ridgeline.

4.0 ORGANIZATIONS CONSULTED

1. E.O. 13985 Sec. 8. requires that federal agencies consult with “underserved” communities, but the BLM never engaged with the Morongo Valley CSD or other local representatives to discuss the community’s needs prior to accepting/processing any right of way applications.
2. The EA does not indicate whether any Tribal Consultations have occurred on-site.
 - a. The absence of records of cultural resources in this area is not indicative of a lack of tribal significance.
 - b. A site survey by tribal governments is prudent, especially prior to the BLM rendering a decision on the Proposed Actions and commencing construction.
3. Local and State fire protection authorities were not consulted to provide input on potential impacts to wildfire suppression and possible mitigation measures.
 - a. If local and state resources will be relied upon for fire protection at the project site, then their respective codes and standards shall be met by the proposed actions.
 - b. Confirm the availability of water and the potential need for new hydrants.
 - c. Confirm the availability of the gravel access road to both physically and structurally support fire department apparatus in accordance with SBC Fire Code Section 503, Fire Apparatus Access Roads. As designed, the proposed access

road is non-compliant with the minimum width and turn-around area, and not enough information has been provided to determine compliance with maximum grade and all-weather surface requirements. Additional area would likely be necessary in order to comply, thus increasing the APE, unless the SB County Fire Protection District approves alternative means.

- d. Determine the potential for increase in wildfire risk due to the addition of fuel storage, high voltage equipment, and refueling operations near homes given the availability of water resources.
- e. Determine the potential for the tower to interfere with aerial fire suppression efforts based on the effective vertical distance above ground for aerial support given the terrain, dry brush, and wind prone conditions.

OTHER TECHNICAL ERRORS THROUGHOUT

1. VRM has been incorrectly defined as “voltage regulator module” in the glossary and throughout the EA, as opposed to the correct definition of “Visual Resource Management.” Given that VRM is the most relevant issue to the LUPA, such an error demonstrates a lack of attention to detail by BLM staff which could lead to confusion among the public during this crucial and limited comment period.
2. The EA has several instances of citing potential beneficial effects to justify unrelated negative effects. This is in violation of 40 CFR 1501.3(d), which says that while one effect could be both beneficial and adverse, “agencies shall not offset an action's adverse effects with other beneficial effects to determine significance (for example, an agency may not offset an action's adverse effect on one species with its beneficial effect on another species).”
3. The presence of an unsigned FONSI document on the BLM website is confusing to members of the public who are now erroneously under the impression that this project has been approved and will be moving forward without their input.

FINDINGS

The significance of impacts has been generally downplayed through omission of key information and the use of outdated resources. Because the impacts to Public Safety, Visual Resources, Environmental Justice, and Cumulative Effects are likely to be significant and unmitigable, this application should be rejected or, at the very least, a comprehensive Environmental Impact Study should be performed.