

## 6.6 Coast Horned Lizard Study Plan

### 6.6.1 Pertinent Issue Questions

The coast horned lizard study addresses Terrestrial Resource Issue Questions:

- 7(a). What are the relevant and known factors (limiting and beneficial) affecting special status terrestrial reptile populations in the Project area and how/where are these factors influenced by Project operation and maintenance?
19. What are the Project impacts on special status terrestrial reptiles?

### 6.6.2 Background

The coast horned lizard has the following special status designations: 1) Federal Special Concern species, a "term-of-art" designation for former Category 2 candidate species; 2) California species of special concern; an administrative designation; and 3) Protected reptile under California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) sport fishing regulations, Title 14. This species is believed to have disappeared from over 35 percent of its former range in northern and central California (USDA 2001). It occurs in several habitats, from sun-exposed gravel and sand areas with scattered shrubs to clearings in riparian woodlands and chaparral. Horned lizards are primarily diurnal and retreat at night into rodent burrows, under rocks, or simply burrow into loose soil. They eat a variety of small insects with harvester ants comprising the bulk of their diet. Following a winter brumation (i.e., hibernation in reptiles), horned lizards breed in the early spring (April and May) and hatchlings emerge in August and September. The primary threats to these animals are loss, fragmentation, and degradation of habitat from 1) urban development; 2) replacement of native ants by invasive Argentine ants; 3) roads; 4) off-highway vehicle use; and 5) noxious weeds. Records are available for this species from near the Project transmission line right-of-way and these lizards are presumed to remain extant where suitable habitat exists throughout the Project area up to an elevation of about 5,000 feet, but especially in the lower foothills.

The Project has no reasonable potential to have a substantial impact on coast horned lizard populations or habitat of the species. Suitable habitat for the species occurs along the western foothill portions of the Project transmission line. Vehicles access the transmission line for maintenance purposes on an irregular and infrequent basis. Access along the western portion of the transmission line is almost exclusively over existing roads and mostly on private lands where vehicle traffic by private landowners is more frequent than that of maintenance vehicles, yet still likely to be of low intensity. Therefore, there is minimal potential for direct encounters with coast horned lizard as a result of Project activities. Based on the limited potential for direct or indirect impacts, no formal study is proposed to address coast horned lizard in the context of Terrestrial Resource Issues 7a and 19.

### 6.6.3 TWG and Plenary Group Endorsement

Terrestrial TWG representatives from the following agencies/organizations approved this study plan on December 21, 2001: California Department of Fish and Game, Eldorado National Forest, California Sport Fishing Alliance, and SMUD. The Plenary Group approved this study plan on February 6, 2002. The participants at the meeting who said they could "live with" the study plan were California Department of Fish and Game, California Native Plant Society, California Outdoors, California Sportsfishing Protection Alliance, El Dorado County, El Dorado County Citizens for Water, Friends of El Dorado County, National Parks Service, Placer County Water Agency, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, State Water Resources Control Board, Taxpayers of El Dorado County, U.S. Bureau of Land Management and Eldorado National Forest. None of the participants at the meeting said they could not "live with" the study plan though PG&E abstained since this study plan does not apply to the Chili Bar Project.

### 6.6.4 Literature Cited

USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service). 2001. Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment; Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volumes 1-6 and Record of Decision. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Pacific Southwest Region, San Francisco. January 2001.