Meeting Date: 12/16/25
Lease Number: 8576
Staff: D. Simpkin

Staff Report 94

APPLICANT:

City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power

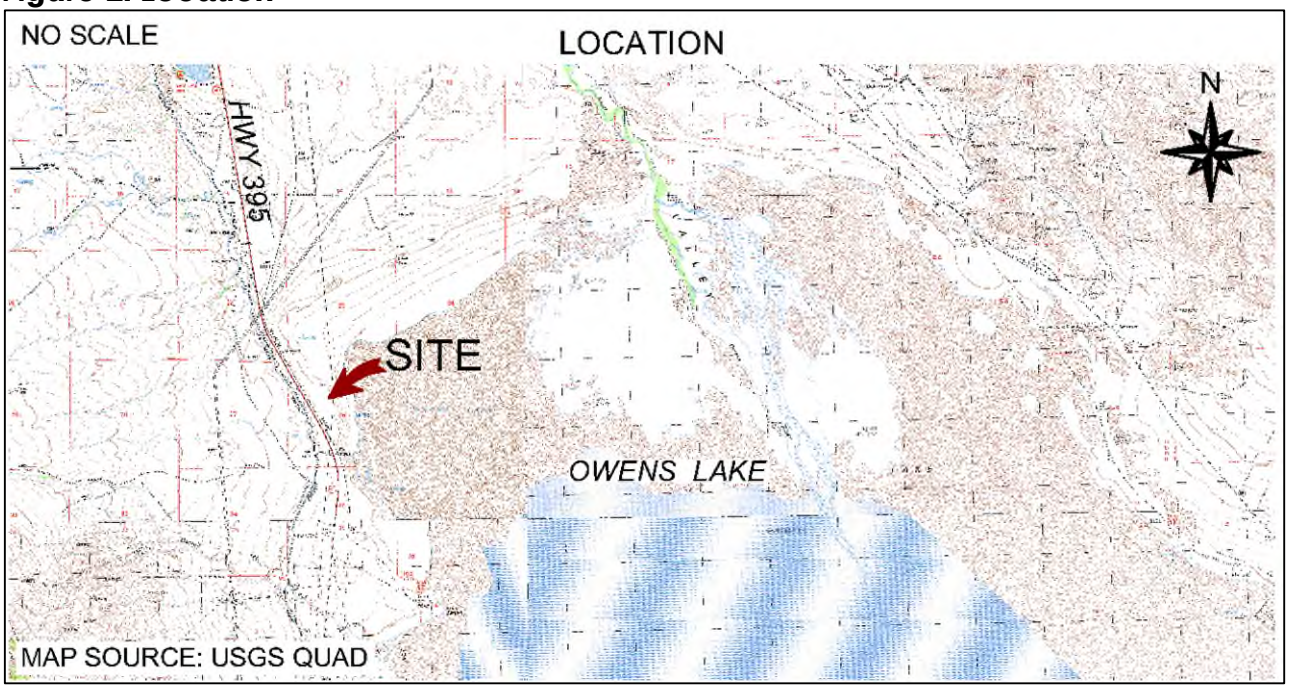
PROPOSED ACTION:

Issuance of a General Lease – Public Agency Use.

AREA, LAND TYPE, AND LOCATION:

Sovereign land on Owens Lake, Assessor's Parcel Number 026-180-02, near Lone Pine, Inyo County (as shown in Figure 1).

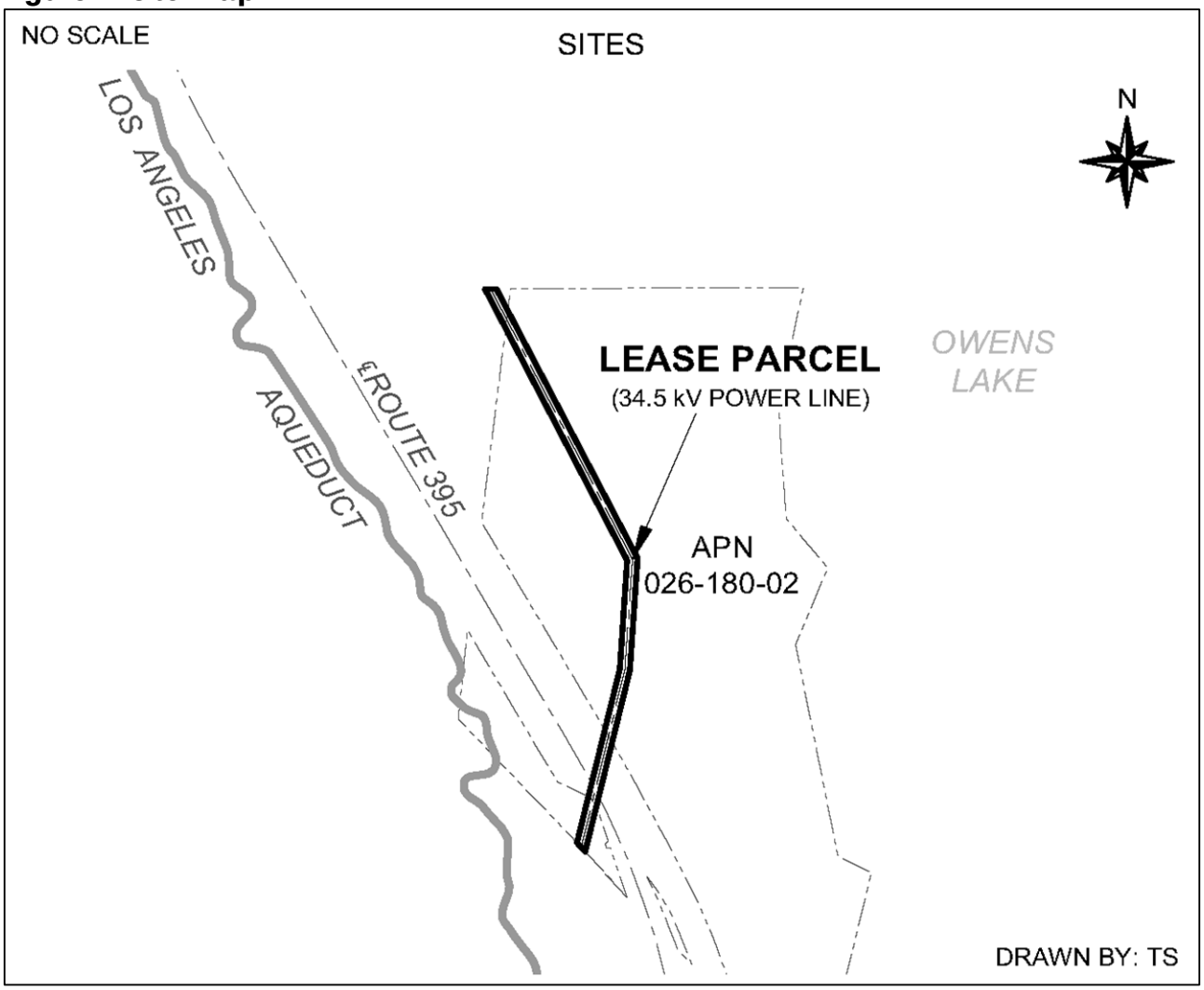
Figure 1. Location



AUTHORIZED USE:

Use of an existing overhead 34.5kV transmission line and poles (as shown in Figure 2).

Figure 2. Site Map



NOTE: This depiction of the lease premises is based on unverified information provided by the Applicant or other parties and is not a waiver or limitation of any State interest in the subject or any other property.

TERM:

20 years, beginning, December 9, 2024.

CONSIDERATION:

The public use and benefit, with the State reserving the right at any time to set a monetary rent if the Commission finds such action to be in the State's best interest.

STAFF ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATION:

AUTHORITY:

Public Resources Code sections 6005, 6216, 6301, 6501.1, and 6503; California Code of Regulations, title 2, sections 2000 and 2003.

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

On June 24, 2008, the Commission authorized a 20-year General Lease – Public Agency Use for the installation and maintenance of a 34.5kV overhead transmission line, and the placement of two stream gauges (Item 43, June 24, 2008). The stream gauges have been removed from the lease premises, and the lease expired on December 8, 2024.

The Application is applying for issuance of a General Lease – Public Agency Use, for use of the overhead transmission line and poles occupying sovereign lands on Owens Lake. The transmission lines convey power to dust mitigation infrastructure located on Owens Lake.

The existing improvements are located on the now dry lakebed of Owens Lake and therefore do not impede public access or interfere with Public Trust needs and values at this location, at this time, and for the term of the proposed lease. The improvements do not significantly alter the land, and the lease does not alienate the State's sovereign interest or permanently impact public rights. The lease is limited to a 20-year term and does not grant the lessee exclusive rights to the lease premises. Upon termination of the lease, the lessee may be required to remove any improvements and restore the lease premises to their original condition.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

INTRODUCTION:

Climate change is significantly altering California's deserts, the hottest and driest regions in the state. As the atmosphere warms, there are more extremely hot days and unpredictable rainfall. Longer droughts are expected, and precipitation

patterns will change in timing and intensity, affecting plant growth and distribution. The desert is likely to see a corresponding increase in wildfires and flash flooding. These impacts may affect an existing overhead electrical transmission facility, including over 4,000 feet of overhead power line subject to the proposed lease, located in sovereign lands in the dry bed of Owens Lake and the Owens River Delta, near Lone Pine, Inyo County.

DATA & PROJECTIONS:

In the desert areas of California, daily average high temperatures are projected to increase significantly by the end of the century (Inland Deserts Summary Report, California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment, 2018). As the atmosphere heats, it can hold more water, and release it in sudden, intense events that may cause flash flooding during the winter months. In the summer months, the monsoon rain patterns that have historically contributed to 30 percent of the desert's annual rainfall are expected to dry up and disappear from the region. Models project there will be more "dry years" (with less than average rainfall) than "wet years" (with more than average rainfall). Finally, many areas in the desert are prone to high wind speeds, and wind speed is projected to increase by 10 percent by 2100.

Table 1. Projected Temperature Increases (in degrees Fahrenheit) in CA Desert

Year	Lower GHG Emissions	Higher GHG Emissions
Present - 2039	+5	+6
2040 - 2069	+6	+10
2070 - 2100	+8	+14

Source: Table adapted from Figure 5, p. 14, Inland Desert Summary Report, California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment.

Table 2. Extreme Heat and Rainfall Projections for CA Desert by 2100

Climate Event	Present Day	2100	Percent Change
Extreme Heat Days/year (>95 degrees Fahrenheit)	90 (Mojave)	141 (Mojave)	+57%
	130 (Palm Springs)	179 (Palm Springs)	+38%
Annual Rainfall Average	5 inches	2.5 inches (dry years)	-50%

Climate Event	Present Day	2100	Percent Change
		7-8 inches (wet years)	+40-60%

Source: Table adapted from "21st Century Climate Projections" section, pp. 14-21, Inland Desert Summary Report, California's Fourth Climate Change Assessment.

ANALYSIS:

More intense rainfall events, drier soils, and stressed and sparse vegetation in this arid region will increase the probability of flash foods near Owens Lake. Dry soils are poor absorbers of rainfall, resulting in high runoff rates. Infrastructure built in dry climates is generally not designed to handle the large flows of water that may be generated in a flash food event. Flash flooding can also leave behind large deposits of mud and debris which may damage roads and other infrastructure such as the subject power lines (California OES, 2024).

The lease premises and improvements will likely experience increased exposure to prolonged and extreme heat, unpredictable precipitation patterns, increased frequency of flash floods, and higher wind speeds for the duration of the lease term. These conditions may increase the risk of wildfire exposure and flooding to the lease premises.

Wildfire risk is also likely to increase in the desert, in connection with the increase in extreme weather. Wildfire risk in the desert is tied to fuel (vegetation) availability, which will fluctuate in relationship to precipitation, and atmospheric conditions. Transmission lines are vulnerable to high temperature and high wind events, which can damage lines and impact transmission capacity. Damaged lines can pose a fire risk for the surrounding area.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Pursuant to the proposed lease, the Applicant acknowledges that the lease premises and adjacent upland are located in an area that may be subject to the effects of climate change. Staff recommends that the Applicant perform routine assessments and maintenance of the transmission cables and related infrastructure to reduce the risk of damage during high wind or high temperature events.

Additionally, the Applicant should monitor the vegetated areas adjacent to the transmission cables and related infrastructure and responsibly treat potential fire

fuel loads. However, airborne dust is also a major concern in the region. Native perennial vegetation can stabilize the soil year-round, minimizing airborne dust and associated impacts to air quality. Therefore, staff does not recommend clearing all vegetation, but to instead monitor for excessive fuel loads and balance potential fire risk with maintaining sufficient perennial vegetation to stabilize the soil.

CONCLUSION:

For all the reasons above, staff believe the issuance of the lease will not substantially impair the public rights or substantially interfere with the Public Trust needs and values at this location, at this time, and for the term of the lease; and is in the best interests of the State.

OTHER PERTINENT INFORMATION:

1. Approval or denial of the application is a discretionary action by the Commission. Each time the Commission approves or rejects a use of sovereign land, it exercises legislatively delegated authority and responsibility as trustee of the State's Public Trust lands as authorized by law. If the Commission denies the application, the Applicant may be required to remove the existing improvements and restore the land to its natural condition. The Lessee has no right to a new lease or to renewal of any previous lease.
2. This action is consistent with the "Leading Climate Activism" and "Meeting Evolving Public Trust Needs" Strategic Focus Areas of the Commission's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan.
3. Staff recommends that the Commission find that this activity is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) as a categorically exempt project. The project is exempt under Class 1, Existing Facilities; California Code of Regulations, title 2, section 2905, subdivision (a)(2).

   Authority: Public Resources Code section 21084 and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061 and California Code of Regulations, title 2, section 2905.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

It is recommended that the Commission:

CEQA FINDING:

Find that the activity is exempt from the requirements of CEQA pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15061 as a categorically exempt project, Class 1, Existing Facilities; California Code of Regulations, title 2, section 2905, subdivision (a)(2).

PUBLIC TRUST AND STATE'S BEST INTERESTS:

Find that the proposed lease will not substantially impair public rights or substantially interfere with Public Trust needs and values at this location, at this time and for the term of the lease; and is in the best interests of the State.

AUTHORIZATION:

Authorize issuance of a General Lease – Public Agency Use to the Applicant beginning December 9, 2024, for a term of 20 years, for the use of an existing 34.5kV overhead transmission line and poles; consideration: the public use and benefit, with the State reserving the right at any time to set a monetary rent if the Commission finds such action to be in the State's best interests.