

November 1, 2016

Regular Meeting

Board of Supervisors

**Item #9f – Letters to
Inyo National Forest
& SCE**

**Updated letters per Stacey
Simon**



Larry Johnston ~ District One Fred Stump ~ District Two Tim Alpers ~ District Three
Tim Fesko ~ District Four Stacy Corless - District Five

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF MONO

P.O. BOX 715, BRIDGEPORT, CALIFORNIA 93517
(760) 932-5538 • FAX (760) 932-5531
Bob Musil, Clerk of the Board

November 1, 2016

Kevin M. Payne, CEO
Caroline Choi, Senior Vice President, Regulatory Affairs
Veronica Gutierrez, Vice President, Local Public Affairs
Southern California Edison
P.O. Box 800
Rosemead, CA 91770

**Re: Request for investigation into cause of arcing of power lines in Mono County
and for defensible space clearing**

Dear Mr. Payne:

The Mono County Board of Supervisors appreciates the attention paid by SCE (in particular staff members Rudy Gonzales, Alex Aguilar, Kyle Kimbrel, and Dan Face) to concerns expressed by residents of the Mono Basin and the County related to damaged power poles and equipment along the line from Lundy Canyon to Lee Vining in the Mono Basin. The Board particularly thanks these staff members for their commitment, on behalf of SCE, to take immediate action to repair and/or replace the damaged equipment.

Besides acknowledging the above, the purpose of this letter is to express the Board's and community's additional concerns regarding recent unexplained incidences of powerline arcing and sparking along this same stretch of line. During a tour of the area which included County representatives, the above SCE staff and community members, several residents described in detail having witnessed frightening shows of sparks, fireballs and other phenomena emanating from these SCE lines. The staff present were not able to attribute these phenomena to any cause.¹

It was suggested at that time that someone with expertise in diagnosing such incidents be brought in to evaluate the infrastructure, power load, usage and any other factor which could be causing the arcing, fireballs and sparking. The Board of Supervisors strongly supports

¹ All instances are unexplained with one exception – one event in the weeks following the Marina Fire was apparently the result of increased power usage by a commercial customer that was not reported to SCE.

this suggestion and asks that SCE move forward expeditiously to bring in appropriate staff and/or consultants to diagnose the problem.

Further, knowing that this arcing is occurring around the poles and along the lines, the Board additionally asks that SCE take aggressive action to comply with the defensible space clearance requirements of ~~California applicable~~ law² and contained within SCE's use permits on the Inyo National Forest (for those sites located on Inyo National Forest lands) by removing the brush and cheat grass which surrounds its infrastructure. The removal of this fuel could make the difference between a spark and a wildfire.

The Board makes this request in response not only to the information described above, but also in response to recent incidents in the Mono Basin involving the ignition of fires, as well as arcing and sparking power lines which either (thankfully) did not result in fire ignition, or were immediately extinguished by witnesses.

Below is a sampling of these events, compiled by concerned Mono Basin residents, which is provided to emphasize the need for immediate action:

1. November 2011: a power pole on the South Lundy moraine snaps overnight during a wind event. The line falls down across a dirt road and sagebrush. Thankfully no fire ignites.
2. January 2012: arcing power lines caused by a broken insulator/detached line during a wind event cause sparking and bright flashing, seen and reported at night. Conditions are dry. Local Mono City and Lee Vining fire personnel stand-by under the arcing lines until it is fixed.
3. Winter 2013: a fire ignites at Highway 395 and Thompson Meadows road beneath the household distribution line; cause is determined to be powerline.
4. June 2013: a raptor lands on a power pole on top of the south moraine of Lundy Canyon and causes the lines to arc. A fire breaks out, but is extinguished by a crew which happens to be nearby training. Winds are building and starting to gust; if not for the quick response of the fire crew, the fire could have quickly gotten out of control. The pole remains in service without alteration (i.e., no bird guards installed) is badly burned, and in a known high-wind area.
5. March 2014: a bright ball of light (arc-flash) is observed at the top of one of the poles near the Filosena Ranch. It is reported to be as wide as the cross-beam, and appears to drop to the ground (or travel down the grounding line). No fire ignites.

² See e.g., Public Resources Code §§ 4292 and 4293, CPUC General Orders 95 and 165, CPUC Resolution ESRB-4, and the North American Electric Reliability Council's (NERC) Standards for Vegetation Management, FAC-003-03.

6. July 2014 (approx. 5:15 am): a loud explosion and bright flash lights up the area near a residence in lower Lundy Canyon and starts a fire at the base of the pole. The fire is extinguished within minutes by the homeowner who witnesses it, and only burns some brush. Lee Vining and Mono City Fire Departments respond, BLM follows up. Both insulators and cross-beam are burned (and have not yet been replaced). The cause is determined to be a powerline.
7. December 2014 (approx. 5:15 am): just south of Mill Creek an entire cross-bar to which the lines are attached breaks off the pole following a wind storm, resulting in lines dangling above the brush. The cross-beam is badly charred and burned, indicating a fire had been ablaze there.
8. June 2016: the Marina Fire ignites at same time of day as previous two witnessed events immediately beneath SCE power line (cause not confirmed as of this writing) and burns approximately 650 acres, threatening homes and businesses.

Thank you very much for your prompt attention to this serious situation. If the County can be of further assistance to the Forest Service in addressing these issues, please do not hesitate to contact Leslie Chapman, County Administrative Officer, at 760-932-5414 or lchapman@mono.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Fred Stump, Chair
On Behalf of the Mono County Board of Supervisors



Larry Johnston - District One Fred Stump - District Two Tim Alpers - District Three
Tim Fesko - District Four Stacy Corless - District Five

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November 1, 2016

Ed Armenta
Forest Supervisor, Inyo National Forest
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200
Bishop, CA 93514

**Re: Request for expedited approvals for Southern California Edison (SCE)
infrastructure maintenance and replacement and for enforcement of land
clearing requirements around such infrastructure in the Mono Basin**

Dear Mr. Armenta:

I am writing on behalf of the Mono County Board of Supervisors to address an issue which surely is as of much concern to the Inyo National Forest as it is to Mono County – namely the repeated wildfire events (or near wildfire events which have been quickly extinguished) associated with Southern California Edison (SCE) infrastructure on Inyo national Forest and adjacent lands in the Mono Basin.

Fires in the Mono Basin have caused significant damage this year, and a history of fire activity in the region during the past five years indicates that with a drier climate, an increase in invasive cheat grass, and aging power supply and transmission infrastructure, action must be taken immediately to prevent catastrophic loss. Power poles and equipment in the Mono Basin require prompt attention – including not only replacement/repair, but also more aggressive enforcement of defensible space requirements around those poles (and underneath associated power lines).

Accordingly, the Board of Supervisors respectfully requests the Inyo National Forest's assistance in expediting all necessary permits and approvals for SCE to immediately replace and maintain aging and damaged poles and equipment on Inyo National Forest Lands in the Mono Basin (and in particular between Lundy Canyon and Lee Vining). The Board requests that this be done in the most expeditious means available - possibly through issuance of a "blanket permit" to SCE for the work, which we understand has been utilized in other regions of California facing similar issues.

The Board additionally requests that the Forest Service aggressively enforce the defensible space clearance requirements of its use permits to SCE for this infrastructure (including the June 2016 Electric Transmission and Distribution Line Emergency Operating Plan, which applies the defensible space and inspection/upkeep requirements of California Public Resources Code §§ 4292 and 4293; NERC Standards for Vegetation Management, FAC-003-03; CPUC orders 95 and 165, and CPUC Resolution ESRB-4 to SCE's activities on Forest Service lands). The removal of dry brush and cheat grass surrounding power poles and lines could make the difference between a spark and a wildfire. Because Mono County lacks enforcement authority over these lands, it (as well as the public) depends on the Forest to ensure that defensible space is maintained.

The Board makes this request in response to recent incidents in the Mono involving the ignition of fires, as well as a half-a-dozen events of arcing and sparking power lines which (thankfully) did not result in fire ignition or were immediately extinguished by witnesses.

Below is a sampling of these events, compiled by concerned Mono Basin residents, which is provided to emphasize the urgency of the request:

1. November 2011: a power pole on the South Lundy moraine snaps overnight during a wind event. The line falls down across a dirt road and sagebrush. Thankfully no fire ignites.
2. January 2012: arcing power lines caused by a broken insulator/detached line during a wind event cause sparking and bright flashing, seen and reported at night. Conditions are dry. Local Mono City and Lee Vining fire personnel stand-by under the arcing line until it is fixed.
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Sincerely,

Fred Stump, Chair
On Behalf of the Mono County Board of Supervisors

Cc: Southern California Edison

