

## 4.3 VEGETATION

### 4.3.1 Proposed Project

#### 4.3.1.1 Affected Environment

The vegetation found within the right-of-way (ROW) was previously disturbed during the initial construction of the fiber optic cable line in 1988-89. Currently, the vegetation consists of the following communities: Developed, Disturbed and Ruderal, Allscale Series, Creosote Bush Series, Creosote Bush-White Bursage Scrub Series, Desert Wash Series, Joshua Tree Woodland Series, and Waters and Wetlands. The characteristics of each of these communities are described next.

#### Developed

Developed areas are areas that have been altered by humans and now display man-made structures, such as houses, paved roads, buildings, parks, and other maintained areas. Developed areas are found throughout the Proposed Project area, primarily in Segment 3 along Stoddard Wells Road.

#### Disturbed and Ruderal

Disturbed and Ruderal areas are often a result of disturbances caused by humans. Ruderal areas are typically characterized by heavily compacted or frequently disturbed soils. Plant species occurring in ruderal areas have adapted to survive in these conditions and readily colonize disturbed ground. Areas of disturbance are often devoid of vegetation or exhibit sparse vegetation comprised of colonizing species or large amounts of mostly non-native colonizing species. Ruderal areas within the Proposed Project area exhibit varying degrees of past surface disturbance. The plant species that occur in ruderal areas within all segments of Proposed Project area include Russian thistle (*Salsola tragus*), Mediterranean grass (*Schismus barbatus*), rubber rabbitbrush (*Chrysothamnus nauseosus*), and red-stemmed filaree (*Erodium cicutarium*).

#### Allscale Series

The Allscale Series (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995) occurs on flats, lower slopes, playas, and valleys at elevations between minus 75 and 1,500 meters (m) in habitats with carbonate-rich soils. This community type generally contains two or more saltbush species, neither of which is the sole or dominant species. The allscale series occurs throughout the Proposed Project area. The saltbush species observed in this community type include allscale (*Atriplex polycarpa*), four-wing saltbush (*Atriplex canescens*), and/or spiny saltbush (*Atriplex confertiflora*). Additional species observed growing in this community included cheesebush (*Hymenoclea salsola*) and bladderpod (*Isomeris arborea*).

#### Creosote Bush Series

The Creosote Bush Series (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995) commonly occurs on alluvial fans, bajadas, and upland slopes at elevations between minus 75 to 1,000 m where soils are well-drained. Creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) is the sole or dominant shrub in the canopy of this series. The ground layer is typically open, with annuals seasonally present. Additional plant species found on-site include four-wing saltbush, brittlebrush (*Encelia farinosa*), pencil cholla (*Opuntia ramosissima*), cheesebush, big galleta (*Pleuraphis rigida*), desert marigold (*Baileya pleniradiata*), apricot mallow (*Sphaeralcea ambigua* var. *ambigua*), and desert dandelion (*Malacothrix glabrata*).

#### Creosote Bush-White Bursage Scrub

Creosote Bush-White Bursage Scrub (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995) typically has well-drained secondary soils with very low available water-holding capacity on slopes, fans, and valleys at elevations between minus 75 to 1,000 m. This community type is dominated by creosote bush and burro bush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), which are normally widely spaced with bare ground between them. Many species of

ephemeral herbs may flower in late March and April if the winter rains are sufficient. This series is common throughout the length of the Proposed Project area. The common shrub species in this community include Nevada ephedra (*Ephedra nevadensis*), rubber rabbitbrush, desert trumpet (*Eriogonum inflatum*), brittlebush (*Encelia farinosa*), desert thorn (*Lycium brevipes* var. *brevipes*), button brittlebush (*Encelia frutescens*), cheesebush, hairy prairieclover (*Dalea mollis*), chia (*Salvia columbariae*), desert peppergrass (*Lepidium fremontii*), and allscale. Succulent species identified included: beavertail cactus (*Opuntia basilaris*), jumping cholla (*Opuntia bigelovii*), golden cholla (*Opuntia echinocarpa*), and pencil cholla.

### **Dry Wash Series**

Dry Wash habitats are characterized as sandy or gravelly drainages and arroyos of the lower Mojave and Colorado deserts (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995). Desert washes and playas are ephemeral drainage features (i.e., features that convey waters only during and immediately following storm events) with no downstream connectivity to other receiving waters. Most desert washes and playas have a sandy substrate and are, therefore, predominantly unvegetated. Most water that accumulates in desert washes and playas ultimately infiltrates this sandy substrate and enters the groundwater table, although some waters evaporate at the surface or are evapotranspired by the sparse vegetation present in the drainage. Desert wash environments generally support large canopy trees, as well as a large variety of forbs and grasses. While several dry intermittent desert washes were observed within and adjacent to the Proposed Project, none of them supported wetland indicator species. The dry wash habitats within the Proposed Project area are dominated by creosote bush, cheesebush, and Mediterranean schismus (*Schismus barbatus*). Other species observed include desert peppergrass and button brittlebush.

### **Joshua Tree Woodlands**

Joshua Tree Woodlands (Sawyer and Keeler-Wolf 1995) usually occur at elevations from 750 to 2,300 m on well drained alluvial or rock slopes in the Mojave Desert. They are characterized as open canopy woodlands of widely scattered Joshua trees growing among a lower canopy of deciduous shrubs. This habitat type exists within the Halloran Springs area of the Proposed Project area. The common species observed include Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*), pygmy-cedar (*Peucephyllum schottii*), desert thorn, bladderpod, Nevada ephedra, rattlesnake weed (*Chamaesyce albomarginata*), white rhatany (*Krameria grayi*), desert trumpet, chia, California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*), bladder sage (*Salazaria mexicana*), Mojave yucca (*Yucca shidigera*), Thurber's sandpaper plant (*Petalonyx thurberi* ssp. *thurberi*), blackbrush (*Coleogyne ramosissima*), and Mediterranean schismus.

### **Waters and Wetlands**

Ivanpah Dry Lake and an associated ephemeral tributary are present within the existing alignment of Segment 1. Approximately 2.42 miles of the route exists within the Ivanpah Dry Lake where vegetation is absent. There are no wetlands present within the Proposed Project area.

### **Sensitive Species<sup>1</sup>**

Chambers Group conducted a biological resources records search within 5 miles of the Proposed Project area using the California Department of Fish and Game's (CDFG) California Natural Diversity Database. Biological surveys of the Proposed Project area were conducted by the Chambers Group in the spring and summer of 2007. A Biological Evaluation Report was prepared in October 2007 to summarize information from the record search and field surveys. Appendix A - Biological Evaluation contains a copy of the Biological Evaluation for the Proposed Project.

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<sup>1</sup> Special-status species are those plants that are listed or proposed for listing under federal and/or state Endangered Species Acts or the California Native Plant Protection Act as endangered, threatened, or rare; federal or state candidates for possible listing as endangered, threatened, or rare; and/or plants listed on California Native Plant Society (CNPS) List 1A, List IB, or List 2.

Web pages and publications of the United States (U.S.) Fish and Wildlife (USFWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and CDFG were consulted to determine if any federally listed threatened or endangered plant species have been reported in the Proposed Project area. Recovery plans, records of listings, conversations, and informal meetings with local personnel of these agencies provided a comprehensive list of threatened or endangered species that might occur within the Proposed Project area. Other primary sources of information included the University of California at Berkeley Database (CalFlora) and the California Native Plant Society (CNPS) online inventory.

A Jurisdictional Delineation was conducted for the Proposed Project by Chambers Group in July of 2007. No wetlands or riparian areas were identified within the Proposed Project area; however, the Proposed Project area contains 0.45 acre of waters of the U.S., consisting of the crossing of the Ivanpah Dry Lake. Segment 2 and Segment 3 would not cross any U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) jurisdictional areas. The Proposed Project has received authorization from the ACOE under Nationwide Permit #12 – Utility Line Activities and a Section 401 Water Quality Certification from the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board under the Clean Water Act for these impacts. In addition to the waters of the U.S. crossed, the Proposed Project would also impact 0.47 acre of waters of the state. The Proposed Project has area also contains 0.47 acre of habitat associated with streambeds that are regulated by the CDFG under Section 1600 of the Fish and Game Code. The Jurisdictional Delineation Report is provided in Appendix A - Biological Evaluation.

Internet sites and publications of the USFWS, BLM, and CDFG were consulted to determine if any federally listed threatened or endangered plant species have been reported in the Proposed Project area. Recovery plans, records of listings, conversations, and informal meetings with local personnel of these agencies provided a comprehensive list of threatened or endangered species that might occur within the Project footprint (i.e., within the 20-foot ROW). Using these sources, the knowledge of professional biologists, and the results of intensive field surveys; it was determined that no threatened or endangered plant species have the potential to occur in the Proposed Project area. The Proposed Project area is also not located in any adopted or designated habitat conservation plan (HCP) or multiple species conservation plan (MSCP) areas.

A sensitive species is considered a potential inhabitant of the Proposed Project if its known geographical distribution encompasses part of the Proposed Project or if its distribution is near the site and if general habitat requirements or environmental conditions (e.g., soil type, elevation, vegetation assemblage, etc.) required for the species are present at the time of the survey. The potential for each sensitive species to occur on the Proposed Project site was assessed during the field survey and literature review. Potential for occurrence is based on the criteria listed in Table 4.3-1: Criteria for Evaluating Potential for Occurrence of Sensitive Plant Species.

Historical information on the location of some sensitive species is not available; therefore, for survey purposes, the presence of environmental conditions or habitats associated with species occurrence requirements may be considered sufficient to give a species a potential for occurrence. Sensitive plant species and their potential for occurrence in the Proposed Project area are provided in Table 4.3-2: Sensitive Plant Species Potentially Occurring within the Proposed Project Area. Species that were determined to have no potential for occurrence based on lack of suitable habitat and/or the Proposed Project's elevation have been omitted.

None of these species listed as sensitive by the CDFG, CNPS, or BLM were observed within the Proposed Project. Only one sensitive plant, rosy two-toned beardtongue (*Penstemon bicolor* ssp. *roseus*), has a moderate potential to occur in the Proposed Project area. All other CNPS/BLM-listed plant species were determined to have a low to no probability of occurring in the Project footprint.

**Table 4.3-1: Criteria for Evaluating Potential for Occurrence of Sensitive Plant Species**

| Potential for Occurrence | Criteria  |
|--------------------------|---|
| No Potential             | Species was not observed during focused surveys conducted at an appropriate time for identification of the species; or species is restricted to habitats or environmental conditions that do not occur within the Proposed Project area.  |
| Low                      | Historical records for this species do not exist within the immediate vicinity (approximately 5 miles) of the Proposed Project and/or habitats or environmental conditions needed to support the species are of poor quality.   |
| Moderate                 | Historical record exists of the species within the immediate vicinity of the Proposed Project area (approximately 5 miles) and marginal habitat exists within the Proposed Project area or the habitat requirements or environmental conditions associated with the species occur within the Proposed Project, but no historical records exist within the vicinity. |
| High                     | Both a historical record exists of the species within the Proposed Project area or its immediate vicinity (approximately 5 miles), and the habitat requirements or environmental conditions associated with the species occur within the Proposed Project area.   |
| Present                  | Species was observed or detected within the Proposed Project area at the time of the survey.  |

**4.3.1.2 Significance Criteria**

Impacts to vegetation resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- substantially affects a species or habitat afforded protection under either the Endangered Species Act or state law; or designated as having special status (Species of Concern, Sensitive Species, etc.) by an overseeing agency;
- eliminates a natural plant community; or
- violates Executive Order 11990 (Wetlands Protection).

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, impacts to vegetation resources would be considered significant if the Proposed Project:

- has a substantial adverse direct or indirect effect on a special status species listed by the USFWS, CDFG, or regional or local regulations;
- has a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies or regulations or by the CDFG or USFWS;
- has a substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands as defined by Section 404 of the Clean Water Act through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means;
- conflicts with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance; or
- conflicts with the provisions of an adopted HCP, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), consideration of significant impact on the human environment is conducted in accordance with Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations 1508.27 (specified in Section 1.2.1 Relationship to NEPA Guidelines). Following the public comment period, a finding regarding a significant impact will be prepared in accordance with this provision.

**Table 4.3-2: Sensitive Plant Species Potentially Occurring within the Proposed Project Area**

| Scientific Name / Common Name                                    | Habitat  | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                 | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential                                    |   |   |
|--|--|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |                 |   | Segment 1   | Segment 2   | Segment 3   |
| <i>Achnatherum aridum</i><br>Mormon needle grass                 | Perennial herb. Joshua tree woodland, pinyon-juniper woodland, on rocky limestone ridges; at elevations ranging from 1640 to 8850 feet amsl. | May – Jul       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <i>Androstephium breviflorum</i><br>small-flowered androstephium | Bulbiferous herb. Mojave desert scrub and desert dunes and bajadas; at elevations ranging from 720 to 3,000 feet amsl.                       | Mar – Apr       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |

<sup>2</sup> Explanation of Status Designations:

Federal designations: (Federal Endangered Species Act, USFWS):

END: Federal-listed, endangered.

THR: Federal-listed, threatened.

PTH: Federal-listed, proposed-threatened

CAN: Candidate species.

State designations: (California/Nevada Endangered Species Act, CDFG)

END: State-listed, endangered.

THR: State-listed, threatened.

RARE: State-listed as rare. (Listed "Rare" animals have been re-designated as Threatened, but Rare plants have retained the Rare designation.)

California Native Plant Society (CNPS) designations: (Note: According to CNPS [Skinner and Pavlik 1994], plants on List 1B and 2 meet definition for listing as threatened or endangered under Section 1901, Chapter 10 of the California Fish and Game Code. This interpretation is inconsistent with other definitions. See text.)

List 1A: Plants presumed extinct in California.

List 1B: Plants rare and endangered in California and throughout their range.

List 2: Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California but more common elsewhere in their range.

List 3: Plants about which we need more information; a review list.

List 4: Plants of limited distribution; a watch list.

Extension 0.1: Seriously endangered in California (>80% of occurrences threatened/high degree and immediacy of threat)

Extension 0.2: Fairly endangered in California (20–80% occurrences threatened)

Extension 0.3: Not very endangered in California (<20% of occurrences threatened)

| Scientific Name / Common Name                                      | Habitat   | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                  | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential   |   |   |
|--|---|-----------------|--|--|---|---|
|  |   |                 |  | Segment 1  | Segment 2   | Segment 3   |
| <i>Arctomecon merriamii</i><br>white bear poppy                    | Perennial herb. Chenopod scrub and Mojave desert scrub on rocky slopes, calcareous soil, loose shale, or sandy washes; at elevations ranging from 1,600 to 5,900 feet amsl. | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.2<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <i>Asclepias nyctaginifolia</i><br>Mojave milkweed                 | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub and pinyon-juniper woodland; at elevations ranging from 3,280 to 5,580 feet amsl.   | May – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <i>Astragalus cimae var. cimae</i><br>Cima milk-vetch              | Perennial herb. Great Basin scrub, joshua tree woodland, and Pinyon and juniper woodland in clay soils; at elevations ranging from 2,920 to 6,070 feet amsl.                | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: None | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <i>Astrolepis cochisensis ssp. cochisensis</i><br>scaly cloak fern | Rhizomatous herb. Joshua tree woodland, pinyon-juniper woodland on carbonate soils; at elevations ranging from 2,950 to 5,900 feet amsl.                                    | Apr– Oct        | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <i>Bouteloua trifida</i><br>red grama                              | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub on carbonate rocky soils; at elevations ranging from 2,300 to 6,560 feet amsl.  | May – Sep       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |

| Scientific Name / Common Name   | Habitat   | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                       | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential   |  |  |
|---|---|-----------------|---|--|--|--|
|   |   |                 |   | Segment 1  | Segment 2  | Segment 3  |
| <i>Camissonia boothii</i> ssp. <i>boothii</i><br>Booth's evening-primrose | Annual herb. Joshua tree woodland, pinyon-juniper woodland; at elevations ranging from 2,950 to 7874 feet amsl.   | Apr – Sep       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Castela emoryi</i><br>crucifixion thorn                                | Deciduous shrub. Mojave desert scrub, Sonoran desert scrub, and playas in gravelly soils; at elevations ranging from 290 to 2,200 feet amsl.                                    | Jun – Jul       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project above elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project above elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> |
| <i>Coryphantha chlorantha</i><br>desert pincushion                        | Annual herb. Joshua tree woodland, Mojave desert scrub, and pinyon-juniper woodland on carbonate, gravelly, and rocky soils; at elevations ranging from 150 to 5,000 feet amsl. | Apr – Sep       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Cymopterus deserticola</i><br>desert cymopterus                        | Perennial herb. Joshua tree woodland and Mojave desert scrub in sandy soils; at elevations ranging from 2,066 to 4,920 feet amsl.   | Mar – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: Sensitive | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Cymopterus gilmanii</i><br>Gilman's cymopterus                         | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub on carbonate soils; at elevations ranging from 3,000 to 6,561 feet amsl.  | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |

| Scientific Name / Common Name  | Habitat   | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                       | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential   |   |  |
|--|---|-----------------|---|--|---|--|
|  |   |                 |   | Segment 1  | Segment 2   | Segment 3  |
| <i>Eriophyllum mohavense</i><br>Barstow woolly sunflower                     | Annual herb. Mojave desert scrub, chenopod scrub, playas; at elevations ranging from 1,640 to 3,150 feet amsl.  | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: Sensitive | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Grusonia parishii</i><br>Parish club-cholla                               | Stem succulent. Mojave desert scrub, Sonoran desert scrub, and Joshua tree woodland, on rock or sandy soils; at elevations ranging from 980 to 5,000 feet amsl. | May – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Linum puberulum</i><br>plains flax  | Perennial herb. Great Basin scrub, pinyon-juniper woodland, Joshua tree woodland, and Mojave desert scrub; at elevations ranging from 3,280 to 8,200 feet amsl. | May – Jul       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Loeflingia squarrosa</i> var. <i>artemisiarum</i><br>sagebrush loeflingia | Annual herb. Great Basin scrub, Sonoran desert scrub, desert dunes on sandy or rock soils; at elevations ranging from 2,300 to 5,300 feet amsl.                 | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: Sensitive  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Menodora scabra</i><br>rough mendora                                      | Perennial herb. Joshua tree woodland, Mojave desert scrub, pinyon-juniper woodland; at elevations ranging from 3,930 to 5,900 feet amsl.                        | May – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> |

| Scientific Name / Common Name  | Habitat  | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                       | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential   |   |  |
|--|--|-----------------|---|--|---|--|
|  |  |                 |   | Segment 1  | Segment 2   | Segment 3  |
| <i>Mentzelia polita</i><br>polished blazing star                           | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub on carbonate soils; at elevations ranging from 3,930 to 4,920 feet amsl.   | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: None      | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> |
| <i>Mentzelia pterosperma</i><br>wing-seed blazing star                     | Annual to perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub on clay or gypseous soils; at elevations around 3,740 feet amsl.   | Apr – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.2<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> |
| <i>Mentzelia tridentata</i><br>creamy blazing star                         | Annual herb. Mojave desert scrub on gravelly to sandy soils; at elevations ranging from 2,296 to 3,800 feet amsl.  | Mar – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.3<br>BLM: None      | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>No Potential.</b> |
| <i>Mimulus mohavensis</i><br>Mojave monkeyflower                           | Annual herb. Mojave desert scrub and Joshua tree woodland in gravelly and sandy soils, often in washes; at elevations ranging from 1,950 to 3,940 feet amsl. | Apr – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: Sensitive | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |
| <i>Opuntia basilaris</i> var. <i>brachyclada</i><br>short-joint beavertail | Stem succulent. Joshua tree woodland, Mojave desert scrub, chaparral, and pinyon-juniper woodland; at elevations ranging from 1,400 to 5,900 feet amsl.      | Apr – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: Sensitive | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>        |

| Scientific Name / Common Name                                      | Habitat  | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                  | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential  |   |   |
|--|--|-----------------|--|---|---|---|
|  |  |                 |  | Segment 1   | Segment 2   | Segment 3   |
| <i>Penstemon bicolor ssp. roseus</i><br>rosy two-toned beardtongue | Perennial herb. Joshua tree woodland and Mojave desert scrub on rocky to gravelly disturbed areas; at elevations ranging from 2,300 to 5,000 feet amsl.              | May             | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present on-site and may occur in disturbed areas of the ROW.<br><b>Moderate Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present on-site and may occur in disturbed areas of the ROW.<br><b>Moderate Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present on-site and may occur in disturbed areas of the ROW.<br><b>Moderate Potential.</b> |
| <i>Penstemon utahensis</i><br>Utah beardtongue                     | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub, Great Basin scrub, chenopod scrub, pinyon-juniper woodland on rocky soils; at elevations ranging from 3,500 to 8,200 feet amsl. | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species.<br><b>No Potential.</b>                     | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            |
| <i>Phacelia anelsonii</i><br>Aven Nelson's phacelia                | Annual herb. Joshua tree woodland and pinyon-juniper woodland on carbonate, sandy, or gravelly soils; at elevations ranging from 3,900 to 5,000 feet amsl.           | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species.<br><b>No Potential.</b>                     | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species.<br><b>No Potential.</b>                     |
| <i>Phacelia parishii</i><br>Parish's phacelia                      | Annual herb. Mojave desert scrub and Playas on clay or alkaline soils; at elevations ranging from 1,640 to 3,940 feet amsl.  | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.1<br>BLM: None | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            | <b>Not Observed</b><br>No suitable habitat present on-site.<br><b>No Potential.</b>                                       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>No suitable habitat present on-site.<br><b>No Potential.</b>                                       |
| <i>Polygala acanthoclada</i><br>Thorny milkwort                    | Shrub. Chenopod scrub, Joshua Tree woodland, pinyon-juniper woodland; at elevations ranging from 2,500 to 7,500 feet amsl.   | May – Aug       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.3<br>BLM: None  | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality.<br><b>Low Potential.</b>                            |

| Scientific Name / Common Name   | Habitat  | Blooming Period | Status Designation <sup>2</sup>                       | Observed / Not Observed On-site and Occurrence Potential  |   |   |
|---|--|-----------------|---|---|---|---|
|   |  |                 |   | Segment 1   | Segment 2   | Segment 3   |
| <b><i>Saltugilia latimeri</i></b><br>Latimer's woodland-gilia                   | Annual herb. Mojave desert scrub, chaparral, and pinyon-juniper woodland on rocky or sandy, often granitic, and washes; at elevations ranging from 1,300 to 6,250 feet amsl. | Mar – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: None      | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>         | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <b><i>Sclerocactus johnsonii</i></b><br>Johnson's bee-hive cactus               | Stem succulent. Mojave desert scrub on granitic soils; at elevations ranging from 1,600 to 4,000 feet amsl.  | Apr – May       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 2.2<br>BLM: None       | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b>         | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |
| <b><i>Sphaeralcea rusbyi</i> var. <i>eremicola</i></b><br>Rusby's desert-mallow | Perennial herb. Mojave desert scrub and Joshua tree woodland on carbonate soils and washes; at elevations ranging from 3,200 to 5,000 feet amsl.                             | May – Jun       | Fed: None<br>CA: None<br>CNPS: 1B.2<br>BLM: Sensitive | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Proposed Project below elevation range of the species. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> | <b>Not Observed</b><br>Habitat present in the area is of low quality. <b>Low Potential.</b> |

#### **4.3.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation**

Fiber optic replacement activities would occur only within existing roads. No vegetation would be cleared or removed. None of the previously listed CNPS List 2, CNPS List 1B, or BLM-sensitive species were observed within the Proposed Project footprint by biologists during field surveys. However, one species, rosy two-toned beardtongue, has a moderate potential to occur in the Proposed Project area and is discussed in further detail next.

#### **Sensitive Plant Species with Moderate Potential to Occur**

Rosy two-toned beardtongue typically occurs on rocky calcareous, granitic, or volcanic soils in washes, roadsides, rock crevices, or similar places receiving enhanced runoff, in the creosote-bursage, blackbrush, and mixed-shrub zones. This species is a perennial herb that flowers during late winter to early spring, typically mid-March to mid-May. Rosy two-toned beardtongue was not observed during the field survey; however, suitable habitat occurs throughout the Proposed Project area. The Project applicant has committed to conducting preconstruction surveys of all suitable habitats within the Proposed Project area for rosy two-toned beardtongue. If the species is observed during the preconstruction surveys, the population would be flagged and/or fenced and avoided during construction. If avoidance is not feasible, AT&T Corp. (AT&T) would contact the appropriate resource agency and develop a plan for relocation of the species. Implementation of these measures ensures that impacts to rosy two-toned beardtongue are less than significant.

There are no jurisdictional wetlands, riparian habitat, or other sensitive vegetation communities identified within the Proposed Project area or present within the Proposed Project alignment. Therefore, the Proposed Project would have no impact on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the CDFG or USFWS.

The Proposed Project is not located within any HCP or MSCP areas; therefore, the Proposed Project would not conflict with any approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plans.

The Proposed Project alignment is located within the County of San Bernardino-designated Resource Conservation (RC) land use zone. The purpose of the RC land use zoning designation is to encourage limited rural development that maximizes preservation of open space, watershed, and wildlife habitat areas; to identify areas where rural residences may be established on lands with limited grazing potential but which have significant open space values; to prevent inappropriate urban population densities in remote and/or hazardous areas of the county; and to establish areas where open space and non-agricultural activities are the primary use of the land, but where agriculture and compatible uses may co-exist. The Proposed Project would not conflict with the RC land use zoning goals and policies.

Desert scrub habitat found along the proposed cable route is regionally important wildlife habitat for many species, including the desert tortoise. However, the Proposed Project would avoid permanent impacts to all desert scrub habitats along the proposed cable route and all fiber optic replacement activities would occur within existing roads and within the ROW.

Temporary crushing of vegetation would occur along approximately 17.4 miles of the fiber optic cable alignment as follows:

- Segment 1: 6.66-mile section outside of Ivanpah Dry Lake
- Segment 2: 5.9-mile section from Cima Road west to Halloran Springs Road
- Segment 3: 4.80-mile Los Angeles Department of Water and Power utility corridor section

Temporary crushing of vegetation within the ROW is anticipated related to construction vehicle maneuvering, installation of vaults and marker posts, and vegetation sidecasting of material from trench excavation along the edge of the ROW. All spoils would be placed on tarps in order to protect the existing vegetation. During backfill, a backhoe would remove the spoil from the tarp to a depth of 6 inches to 8 inches above the ground. Hand shovels would then be used to remove the remaining spoils from the tarp.

No vegetation removal would occur. This temporary disturbance would occur only within the shoulder of the road, where previously disturbed vegetation is recovering within the berms of the road, due to the low volume of traffic along these dirt roads. The exception is use of the BLM authorized Raceway for off-road vehicles that occurs twice annually on portions of the Segment 3 road section). Biological monitors would be with each crew to ensure that no previously undisturbed vegetation would be impacted.

Laydown areas would be located adjacent to the ROW within areas mostly devoid of vegetation. Any temporary impacts caused by laydown areas would occur only to previously disturbed vegetation. Offsite laydown/staging areas would be located in currently developed areas and would not involve ground disturbance (see Section 2.1.4 Temporary Construction Areas).

New marker poles (a maximum of 77) would be installed and approximately 189 marker poles may be replaced along the direct bury portions of the segments. The posts are 6 inches by 6 inches wide by 8 feet to 16 feet tall. The maximum zone of potential disturbance for installation of marker poles is a 5-foot by-5-foot area and would be contained immediately adjacent to the ROW. The marker poles are typically placed approximately 3 feet outside the edge of the road. Any temporary/permanent impacts caused by marker pole installation and replacement would occur only to non-vegetated and/or previously disturbed vegetation within the ROW.

Operations activities would require very little maintenance and may include driving the line periodically to inspect the line and very occasionally to repair the isolated problems that may be caused by unusual events (e.g., exposure of a small segment of the line caused by a 100-year water event). All operations-phase repair activity would abide by the same "protective measures" applicable to the Proposed Project. No removal of adjacent habitat during construction activities would be allowed. No impacts outside of the existing roads would be authorized by AT&T. After the end of its useful life, the cable would be abandoned in place in the utility ROW corridor, unless directed otherwise at the time by the BLM and the California State Lands Commission (CSLC).

### **Vegetation Restoration**

Vegetation restoration is the last phase of the Proposed Project. Detailed grooming of all disturbed road areas to pre-Project contours followed by overseeding with native vegetation would be conducted during the appropriate seeding time, following construction, which would maximize the percent survival rate of the seed. Roadways and temporary laydown areas would not be seeded; only the disturbed areas outside the roadways would be seeded. The seed pallet would not include any non-native vegetation or noxious weeds. In addition, should the Proposed Project be approved, the Project applicant would be required to implement the following mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level:

- MM-VEG-01: Post-Project monitoring assessment(s) of success criteria, including equal or greater ground cover percentage compared to the surrounding undisturbed areas after 3 years, for newly seeded areas shall be implemented. This post-Project monitoring shall occur for 3 years during the spring flowering period. If the percent coverage is not greater than or equal to the surrounding native vegetation, the areas shall be reseeded and monitored for an additional 2 years.

If succulents or cacti are found to be in harm's way and the Proposed Project is approved, the Project applicant would be required to implement the Succulent Transplanting Plan, provided as Appendix E - Succulent Transplanting Plan, in addition to the following mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less-than-significant level:

- MM-VEG-02: Prior to removing any cactus or yucca, the plant shall be inspected by a biologist qualified to determine if nesting birds, such as cactus wren or other passerine bird species, are occupying or nesting in or around the plant if the removal is to occur between February 15 and July 30.

- MM-VEG-03: If 80 percent survivorship is not observed and the replacement plantings were not sufficient to counteract the losses, remedial planting shall be implemented. For every full-sized mature plant that was lost, 10 seedlings of the same species shall be planted in the vicinity of the original planting and with similar soil conditions. Replacement planting success shall be surveyed again after 2 years to ensure that a minimum of 50 percent survivorship of is achieved. If 50 percent survivorship of replacement plantings is not achieved, 10 seedlings of the same species shall be planted again in the vicinity of the original planting and with similar soil conditions.
- MM-VEG-04: The biannual reports prepared in accordance with the Succulent Transplanting Plan, which shall describe any remedial actions taken, shall be submitted to the CSLC and the BLM.

Based on incorporation of the previously-mentioned applicant-proposed plan and the mitigations measures, a less-than-significant impact to sensitive species and unique plant assemblages would occur.

#### **4.3.2 No Action Alternative**

Selection of the No Action Alternative, as described in Section 2.5.1 No Action Alternative, would not result in construction of the Proposed Project, and potential effects to vegetation resources described in Section 4.3.1.3 Impacts and Mitigation would not occur.