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20 November, 2000

Brad Wetstone, CPUC
 C/o Aspen Environmental Group
 235 Montgomery Street, Suite 800
 San Francisco, CA 94104

Re: Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report
 Northeast San Jose Transmission Reinforcement Project.

Dear Mr. Wetstone,

This letter is written in response to the above Supplemental DEIR of the above project, but particularly the 230kV transmission line proposed to travel between mileposts 4.9 and 6.7.

We appreciate the considerations undertaken in response to our earlier letter responding to the DEIR. However, it is apparent in the SDEIR that our concerns were not completely understood. Specifically:

B.2.5 The McCarthy Boulevard Alternative Segment

It is correct that there is a large mitigation pond here, making this segment (4.9 to 5.6) an important bird area that should be avoided at all costs. The alternative successfully addresses that problem. But this is not the site of SFBBO's long-term bird study. In fact the entire stretch of Coyote Creek between 5.6 and 6.7 constitutes a mitigation project of the Santa Clara Valley Water District and is the site of our 10+ years of study on the effects of riparian revegetation upon bird use. This study is unique in the west; our work is an important reference site for agencies charged with managing flood control projects in riparian zones. Additionally, this area is viewed as the last remnant of quality riparian habitat left in Santa Clara County:

"In spite of alterations over nearly a century, lower Coyote Creek is considered the highest quality riparian corridor remaining in the South Bay region."
 -Watershed Characteristics Report, Santa Clara Basin Watershed Management Initiative, May 2000.

For mileposts 5.6 to 6.7, only one alternative is proposed, the Southern Underground Alternative, which is both costly and geologically impossible, according to the SDEIR. Another alternative was quickly dismissed:

Section B.3.2 Overhead Route through Milpitas (along the 880 Freeway)

This route was not considered for three reasons, and we question the reasoning in all three. Following the bullets in this section:

- The alternative crossing and possible path is considerable north of the 880/237 interchange and does not affect the existing retail center.
- An overhead crossing of Coyote Creek at milepost 6.7 would be far superior than the proposed routing of towers down the levee separating the sewage ponds from the overflow channel, both extremely important bird use areas. We find it difficult to accept that these high towers would require permanent removal of a 100' wide swath of all riparian vegetation (C.7.1). Even if some trees had to be cut back, this short crossing would still create less bird strike impact. The SDEIR states that there is no "designated" crossing of Coyote Creek in this area. We don't see why such a crossing could not be designated, when the lessening of bird strikes impacts are recognized. The line could cross back at milepost 4.9, an already superior alternative as shown on Figure B-5.
- We are not suggesting these lines go anywhere near the McCarthy Boulevard offramp on 237.

We do want to know why PG&E fails to consider placing towers east of Coyote Creek and north of the retail center, either along the newly developing McCarthy Boulevard which intersects Dixon Landing Road at its northern terminus, or along 880's west shoulder. We don't see any reference to a consultation with Caltrans on this question. The SDEIR seems to carefully avoid consideration of an overhead transmission line in this area. It appears that PG&E is dismissing this entire location by only considering an underground alternative. It seems clear to us that installing bird flight diverters is PG&E's preferred alternative to pursuing the question of rerouting the towers along 880 or McCarthy Boulevard.

To reiterate our earlier statement, which the SDEIR does not respond to:

"We approve of the 880 A and B alternatives for the north end of the line. No lines should go anywhere near the Bayside Business Park wetlands area, which supports huge flocks of migratory waterfowl, especially in the fall. Why are no such alternatives offered for the southern portion? The DEIR states that the east side of 880 is too "densely developed", but what about the west side? In fact, the west edge of 880 between 237 and Dixon Landing Road is nearly wide open, with development of the former agricultural lands at McCarthy Ranch just beginning. It appears that this alternative is not considered anywhere in the DEIR."

In conclusion, we feel the SDEIR does not satisfactorily address at least one real alternative to the preferred route. We understand the need for increased energy supply in the south bay area, but respectfully disagree that the significant biological impacts are unavoidable.

Sincerely,

Janet T. Hanson
 Executive Director

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