

3. Introduction to the Initial Study

3.1 Proposed Project Overview

Siskiyou Telephone proposes to install fiber optic broadband facility cable within a conduit for approximately 17 miles within the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) right-of-way in or adjacent to State Highway 96, in both the Klamath National Forest and Six Rivers National Forest. The United States Forest Service is performing a separate environmental review of the Proposed Project prior to issuance of a Special Use Permit.

Construction of the entire fiber optic broadband facility cable would take approximately 195 days over a 2-year period, with construction occurring only during the dry season (April through October). Siskiyou Telephone has stated that the purpose of the Proposed Project is to provide reliable telephone and broadband service capability to existing and future residences in the area between Clear Creek and Ti Bar and remote areas of Siskiyou County, and to complete a continuous fiber optic route between Interstate 5 and U.S. Highway 101.

3.2 Environmental Analysis

3.2.1 CEQA Process

This Initial Study (IS) has been prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the amended State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.), and the CPUC CEQA rules (Rule 2.4). The purpose of the IS is to inform the decision-makers, responsible agencies, and the public of the Proposed Project, the existing environment that would be affected by the project, the environmental effects that would occur if the project is approved, and proposed mitigation measures that would avoid or reduce environmental effects.

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) has been prepared based on the assessment of potential environmental impacts identified in the IS. All potentially significant impacts associated with the project can be mitigated to a level below significance; therefore, an MND can be adopted by the CPUC in accordance with Section 21080 of the CEQA Public Resources Code.

3.2.2 CEQA Lead Agency

Siskiyou Telephone Company (Siskiyou Telephone) has filed an application for CASF funding in the underserved areas along the State Highway 96 corridor between Somes Bar and Happy Camp in Siskiyou County. The CPUC approved funding for the project from the CASF on December 15, 2016 in Resolution T-17539. Resolution T-17539 stipulates that prior to receiving funds from the CASF grant, the proponent is required to provide a Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) and the CPUC must complete review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The CPUC is the lead agency for review of the project under CEQA, because it must make a decision whether to adopt the MND and to approve the funding.

3.2.3 Initial Study

The IS presents an analysis of potential effects of the Proposed Project on the environment. The IS is based on information from Siskiyou Telephone's Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) and associated submittals, site visits, CPUC data requests, and additional research.

Construction activities and project operation could have direct and indirect impacts on the environment. The following environmental parameters are addressed based on the potential effects of the Proposed Project and potential growth-inducing or cumulative effects of the project in combination with other projects:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gases
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation and Traffic
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Mandatory Findings of Significance

The IS has been organized into the following sections:

- Section 3: Introduction. Provides an introduction and overview describing the Proposed Project and the CEQA process, and identifies key areas of environmental concern.
- Section 4: Project Description. Presents the project objectives and provides an in-depth description of the Proposed Project, including construction details and methods.
- Section 5: Environmental Analysis and Mitigation. Includes a description of the existing conditions and analysis of the Proposed Project's potential environmental impacts, and identifies mitigation measures to reduce potentially significant impacts to less than significant levels.
- Section 6: Mitigation Monitoring Plan. Includes applicant proposed measures (APMs) and mitigation measures that Siskiyou Telephone must implement as part of the project, actions required to implement these measures, monitoring requirements, and timing of implementation for each measure.
- Appendix A: Maps of Creek Crossings
- Appendix B: Siskiyou Telephone's Site Plans
- Appendix C: Report Preparation. Lists the preparers of the Initial Study.
- Appendix D: References. Lists the sources of information used to prepare the Initial Study.
- Appendix E: Air Quality/Greenhouse Gas Emissions Calculations