

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



September 30, 2011

Mr. Mark Cassady
TRC, Inc.
Senior Biologist
80 Stone Pine Rd # 200
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Subject: Atascadero - San Luis Obispo 70kV Power Line Reconductoring Project Variance Request #6 for a Connection to the Existing Access Roads between Poles 66/2 and 66/1

Dear Mr. Cassady:

We have reviewed Variance Request #6, which Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) submitted on September 28, 2011 for the Atascadero - San Luis Obispo 70kV Power Line Reconductoring Project (Project) and have determined that the proposed connection to the existing access roads would not have significant new or greater environmental impacts than analyzed in the approved Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the project, pursuant to the description and analysis presented in this letter.

Proposed Actions

PG&E is requesting use of an existing ranch road to serve as a connection between the access roads currently terminating at Poles 66/2 and 66/1 on Santa Maragarita Ranch. A portion of the road passes over a seasonal wetland, as shown in Attachment A (PG&E's Variance Request). It was previously believed that poles between 66/2 and 66/1 could be accessed off of Highway 101. However, Caltrans has stated that they will not allow installation of a gate as part of the Encroachment Permit authorization. PG&E believes this connection road is the best alternative for gaining access to these poles.

PG&E discussed potential impacts resulting from use of this connection road through a seasonal wetland via email with Ian Liffman of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and Julia Dyer of the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and they do not have concerns with its use (see Email Correspondence in Attachment A), provided the road is not used during the wet season (November 1 to April 1) and no improvements, grading, or mats are required.

Use of the road would not require any improvements beyond mowing for fire safety if vegetation is too high. The intention of PG&E is to finish work in this area during the dry season so as to not require installation of mats for work in a saturated condition. If work necessitates the use of mats, grading or other work at a later date, then PG&E will conduct additional coordination with the RWQCB, the Corps, and CPUC prior to installation and may require modifications to 404 permits.

CPUC Analysis of Environmental Impacts

Biological Resources. Roads were for biological resources as part of the original project field work, as discussed in the IS/MND. California red-legged frog (CRLF) was determined to have

potential to occur in the areas of the project corridor containing suitable aquatic breeding habitat and upland refugia habitat. No designated critical habitat for CRLF was identified in the area of the proposed connection road.

Updated biological surveys in the vicinity of the new road were conducted by Terra Verde Environmental Inspectors Jessica Adinolfi and Kristen Nelson on September 9th. No CRLF or other sensitive species were observed within the survey area. The EIs determined that the area around the road did not provide suitable habitat for CRLF but did show evidence of seasonally ponded water. They also indicated that the road may provide a dispersal corridor for CRLF during the rainy season and that measures may need to be taken if this road is to be used during that time. As noted above, PG&E intends to finish the work in this area in the dry season. As part of this variance approval, the road will not be used from November 1 to April 1. If it must be used between that timeframe, PG&E will provide evidence of coordination with the ACOE and the RWQCB for revisions to existing permits for the use of mats or placement of fill and potentially additional consultation with USFWS for impact to CRLF. No work after November 1 will commence without proof of consultation and updated permits provided to CPUC.

Use of the road will not necessitate earth disturbance; thus, general monitoring by a CRLF monitor is not proposed. Pre-construction biological surveys will be performed before the road is used and project APM and mitigation measures defined in the IS/MND will be implemented as appropriate to the area and the activity. No additional new or greater impacts are anticipated provided all mitigation measures, APMs, and necessary coordination are implemented.

Cultural Resources. The new access road is within the corridor originally surveyed for cultural resources. No resources with potential for listing in the California Register of Historic Resources or the National Register of Historic Places were identified in the area as part of the fieldwork. No additional new or greater impacts to cultural resources, including any resulting from discovery of any previously unknown resources during construction, are anticipated provided all mitigation measures and APMs are implemented.

Air Quality. The project as proposed resulted in significant fugitive dust emissions that exceeded the standards of the APCD; however, the IS/MND includes mitigation measure AQ-1, which, if implemented reduces impacts from fugitive dust to less than significant levels. Thus, any potential increases in fugitive dust emissions that would result from mowing or use of the road would be reduced to less than significant levels with adherence to the dust control measures in mitigation measure AQ-1, and no new or greater impacts than were addressed in the IS/MND are anticipated.

Noise and Traffic. Noise and traffic impacts would be similar to the impacts assessed in the IS/MND and would not have new or greater impacts.

Hazards and Hydrology. Hazards and hydrology impacts would be the same as assessed in the approved IS/MND. Measures to contain spills and minimize hazards, including fire hazards, and to prevent sedimentation or runoff would be implemented as required in the approved IS/MND. No new or greater impacts associated with hazards or hydrology would occur.

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Approval

The new connection road between Poles 66/2 and 66/1 will not have significantly greater or new significant impacts beyond those identified in the IS/MND prepared for the Project. Variance Request #6 is approved for use of the road outside the wet season (November 1 to April 1). If the road must be used during the wet season the following must be performed and provided to CPUC before use can commence: PG&E will provide evidence of coordination with the ACOE and the RWQCB for revisions to existing permits for the use of mats or placement of fill or materials and potentially additional consultation with USFWS regarding impacts to CRLF. Please contact me or Andrew Martin of RMT if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

MJ Orsaba

Lisa Orsaba

CPUC Project Manager

Cc: Andrew Martin, RMT, Inc.
Tania Treis, RMT, Inc.
Judi Mosely, PG&E attorney

Attachment A: Variance #6 Request Submittal