

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
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October 14, 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 #7 for additional access roads, overland travel routes from existing roads, and road maintenance needs.

Dear Mr. Cassady:

We have reviewed Variance Request #7, which Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) submitted on October 6, 2011 for the Atascadero - San Luis Obispo 70kV Power Line Reconductoring Project (Project) and have determined that the proposed additional access roads would not have significant new or greater environmental impacts than those 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 additional access routes and select maintenance activities along the wood pole segment located in the Atascadero and Santa Margarita areas, as shown in Attachment A (PG&E's Variance Request). Access routes to project facilities were identified by PG&E during the planning process, and these routes were included in Figure 2.4 of the approved Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) as either "Existing Access Road", "Reestablished Access Road", or "Overland Access Route" category. The proposed modifications include:

- Addition of overland spur routes to Poles 61/8, 61/9, 61/10, 61/11, 63/8, 64/1, and 66/10 to connect existing roads to the 40-foot work area
- Change in designation from "Overland Access Route" to "Reestablished Access Road" on existing overland routes to Poles 65/3, 65/4, 65/5, and 66/4
- Establishment of an alternate "Existing Access Road" to Pole 66/3

Additional Overland Access Routes within the Existing Transmission Line Right-of-Way.

PG&E has identified additional access spur routes along the wood pole segment located in the Atascadero and Santa Margarita areas. These routes are overland spur routes off of existing access roads and would connect the currently designated access roads to the 40-foot work area around Poles 61/8, 61/9, 61/10, 61/11, 64/1, and 66/10. The road to 64/1 extends west from Morningside Drive past several residences and continues into the backyard of a residence located near the pole site. The road is currently used by PG&E for maintenance access. As a condition of approval for this variance, PG&E will coordinate with the affected residences prior to use of the driveway to Pole 64/1.

Changes of Access Road Category. The existing overland routes to Poles 65/3 to 65/5 and 66/4, which were previously identified as “Overland Access Routes,” require grading and vegetation clearing and need to be reclassified as “Reestablished Access Road” per the categories defined in Figure 2.4 of the IS/MND. The access road to Poles 65/3 to 65/5 and 66/4 would also be accessed via an existing California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) maintenance road; thus, authorization from Caltrans is required and is a condition of approval for this variance.

New Existing Access Roads Not Previously Identified in the IS/MND. PG&E has identified an alternate existing access road to Pole 66/3 in the Santa Margarita area. The alternate road to Pole 66/3 follows an existing road on Santa Margarita Ranch that is used for ranching purposes. It would replace the existing overland route, which traverses a steep slope through oak woodlands. The alternate road will be covered under the access agreement that is currently being developed with the property owner. No grading would be performed on this road. 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 during the rainy season, then PG&E must conduct additional coordination with the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and California Public Utilities (CPUC) prior to installation and may require updates to their permits from these agencies. PG&E will also finalize the agreement with the property owner prior to use of the road for alternate access.

CPUC Analysis of Environmental Impacts

Biological Resources. Biological resource issues and measures are presented in Table 1 and described further below.

Table 1: Summary of Biological Resources for Proposed Activities in Variance 7				
Poles	Type of Route	Biological Surveys	Sensitive Habitat?	Protection Measures/Conditions of Variance
61/8 through 61/11	New overland route	Completed for original project work.	No, mostly residential and rural residential areas	None beyond those required by the IS/MND
63/8	New overland route	Completed for original project work	No	None beyond those required by the IS/MND
64/1	New overland route	Completed for original project work	No, through a backyard	Must obtain permission from landowner
66/10	New overland route	Completed for original project work	Within Critical Habitat for CRLF and adjacent to a wetland area	No work will occur between November 1 and April 1 All other measures in the BO and MND pertaining to CRLF, raptors, etc., must be implemented
65/3,4,&5	Change from overland route	Completed for original	High suitability of	No work will occur between November

and 66/4	to re-established access road	project	habitat for CRLF	1 and April 1 on these routes. The area would require a CRLF monitor during grading All other measures in the BO and MND pertaining to CRLF, special status plant species, raptors, etc., must be implemented
66/3	New alternative existing access road	Conducted for variance	Low suitability for habitat except one ephemeral drainage approximately 300 feet north of the access road	No improvement to 2 track permitted. No grading or improvements permitted. If work necessitates the use of mats during the rainy season, then PG&E will conduct additional coordination with the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and California Public Utilities (CPUC) prior to installation and implement any required measures. PG&E will also finalize the agreement with the property owner prior to use of the road for alternate access.

California Red-Legged Frog. Results of the original biological survey work indicate that the following poles are near habitat or are within Critical Habitat for CRLF: 66/10, 65/3, 65/4, and 65/5. The biological opinion (BO) and IS/MND addresses overland access and road grading and usage within or near CRLF habitat. All measures identified must be implemented for the proposed access to these poles in order to minimize effects to CRLF. No work will occur between November 1 and April 1 along these access roads. A biological monitor should be present for grading within CRLF habitat, as required in the MND and BO.

The proposed access to pole 66/3 largely does not have habitat for CRLF. The one exception is an ephemeral drainage approximately 300 feet north of the access road. No grading would occur on the new route to 66/3. Use of this route would not impact CRLF with implementation of measures identified in the IS/MND.

Special Status Plants. All routes except to 66/3 were surveyed during the initial project surveys. Impacts to special status plants would be the same as addressed in the IS/MND for use of overland routes and grading of roads. Measures regarding special status plants would be implemented as identified in the IS/MND to ensure less than significant impacts to special status plant species.

Plant surveys were conducted for the access route to Pole 66/3 on September 29, 2011. Half of the species observed during the plant survey were identified as non-native species; however, wetland species were also observed within and adjacent to the proposed alternate access route. Four species observed along the roadway are classified as facultative wetland species (species generally

found in wetland habitats but occasionally found in non-wetland areas). The timing for the botanical survey was outside of the blooming period for most of the sensitive plant species with potential to occur; however, Terra Verde concluded that sensitive botanical species were unlikely to occur in the area given its history of disturbance, the nearby vegetation, and the high number of non-native species. Since no grading would occur on route 66/3, impacts to special status plants, were they to occur, are not anticipated.

Raptors, nesting birds, burrowing owl. Raptors, nesting birds, and burrowing owl could occur in the areas proposed in this variance. Impacts would be the same as those addressed in the IS/MND for use of overland access roads, existing access roads, and re-establishment of access roads. Measures pertaining to the protection of any sensitive species and habitats must be implemented (i.e., surveys and avoidance during the nesting season).

With implementation of all pertinent mitigation measures and APMs in the IS/MND, no additional new or greater impacts to biological resources are anticipated.

Cultural Resources. Applied Earthworks (Æ) conducted the original archaeological and historical resources surveys for the 15.5 mile project route in November and December 2008. No resources were found in the proposed routes identified in this variance. Æ surveyed for cultural resources on September 6, 2011 for the new access route to Pole 66/3. Æ surveyed Poles 66/3 and 66/4 and determined that no archaeological or historical sites were identified within the area surveyed. 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 measures AQ-1, which would reduce impacts from fugitive dust to less than significant levels. Thus, any potential increases in fugitive dust emissions that would result from additional road grading and mowing along the existing overland routes to Poles 65/3 to 65/5, and 66/4 and use of additional access roads 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. All relevant mitigation from the IS/MND must be implemented.

Hazards and Hydrology. Hazards and hydrology impacts would be the same as assessed in the approved IS/MND for the new routes proposed in this variance. 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.

Approval

The additional overland access roads for Poles 61/8 through 61/11, 63/8, 64/1, and 66/10; the change in designation from overland routes to grading and vegetation removal of Poles 65/3 through 65/5,

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and 66/4; and the alternate access road to Pole 66/3 will not have significantly greater or new significant impacts beyond those identified in the IS/MND prepared for the project. Provided PG&E coordinates with the appropriate parties as necessary and implements all mitigation measures pertinent to the project, Variance Request #7 is approved. 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 #8 Request Submittal