

June 1, 2012

Mr. Michael R. Peevey, President
California Public Utilities Commission
505 Van Ness Avenue
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Commissioner Peevey:

I write to respectfully request that you, and a member of your executive staff from the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), meet with me, property owners and concerned residents about the tree-trimming and removal work currently being performed by Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) underneath a 39-mile stretch of transmission lines in Sonoma County. Having followed this issue and met with the residents and the utility on numerous occasions since December 2011, I firmly believe that a legislative or regulatory solution is needed immediately.

To date, property owners and residents have experienced the removal of trees that posed no threat to service reliability or public safety, and the public communication by the utility has been inadequate, inconsistent, and misleading. For example, thousands of trees have been spray painted. Initially, the utility's publicly stated proposal called for the clear cut of all of the trees in order to comply with state and federal law. However, no such state or federal law exists. It should also be noted that many of these trees were 40 or more feet from transmission lines. As verified by arborists, some trees were decades away from even growing into the clearance zone. It should be further noted that the utility also publicly informed property owners that their intention was to make this stretch "grassland." Changing this area from an oak woodland and redwood grove to a 39-mile, 150-foot wide stretch of grassland is not even good forestry practice, primarily because grasslands pose increased fire hazards as they ignite quicker and spread faster. This is just a small sample of the concerns that you will hear from property owners and residents.

This controversy is also not limited to Sonoma County, further supporting notion that a legislative or regulatory fix is in order. For example, in August 2009, residents noticed that two trees had been cut down in TJ Martin Park, a city park in San Jose. After some research, the residents learned that PG&E had removed the two trees and had a plan to remove another 140 trees in both TJ Martin and another San Jose location, Jeffrey Fontana Park. The 140 trees represented about 30% of the trees in both parks. After months of protests and community meetings, PG&E agreed to remove only 13 trees. The following year, PG&E proposed to remove another 55 trees. Again, after many months of protests and community meetings, PG&E agreed to cut only seven trees. And just two days ago, I was contacted by a property owner in Paso Robles who was told that two trees needed to be removed from his property. Later that day, the property owner discovered that approximately 30 trees had been removed and others were so grossly trimmed that the trees are essentially eight-foot high stumps. The property

owner has sent me video footage that I have forwarded to your legislative affairs department. Lastly, PG&E has informed me that they have 900 miles of transmission lines where vegetation management work must be done including work in wooded areas of Mendocino and Humboldt counties.

As you may be aware, I introduced legislation, AB 2556, to address this matter earlier this year. Despite passing the Assembly Utilities and Commerce Committee, the bill did not pass the Assembly Appropriations Committee. It is not without notice that three of the major utilities opposed AB 2556 even though nothing in my legislation prohibited the utilities from trimming or removing trees to comply with all state and federal transmission and distribution line clearances. While the legislation has stalled, I remain committed to resolving this matter and I will be introducing new legislation in the Senate.

However, for the reasons stated above, I believe that the PUC needs to review the issue and open a proceeding to develop regulations that prevent unnecessary and egregious tree-trimming and tree removals. The commission should also establish a uniform, fair, and efficient process for communities and electrical utilities to implement vegetation management plans that protect service reliability, public safety, property owners, and the environment.

Again, I respectfully request your immediate attention and assistance in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL ALLEN
Assistant Majority Leader
Assembly Member, 7th District

cc: Members, California Public Utilities Commission
Save Our Sonoma Trees
Martin-Fontana Parks Association
Sonoma County Open Space District
Sierra Club, Redwood Chapter
Audubon Society
Assembly Member Jared Huffman
Assembly Member Wes Chesbro
Senator Noreen Evans