STATE OF CALIFORNIA EDMUND G. BROWN JR., *Governor*

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298

August 22, 2013

Mr. P.J. Martinez
Vice President, Asset Management
Pacific Gas & Electric Company
245 Market Street, #1064
San Francisco, CA 94105

Re: Sonoma County Right of Way Reclamation Project

Dear Mr. Martinez:

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC or the Commission) has received numerous complaints from local residents and elected officials concerning Pacific Gas and Electric's (PG&E) "Right of Way Reclamation Project" (Project) in Sonoma County. In response to the concerns raised with the Commission, CPUC staff has reviewed the PG&E vegetation management procedure, Project plans and conducted a field visit on June 18 and 19, 2013.

At this point, most of the concerns raised by the impacted stakeholders, collectively referred to as the Sonoma County parties, appear to be environmental. Specifically, the Sonoma County parties assert that PG&E has not taken into account how the Project will effect endangered/threatened species, soil retention and flood control. Commission staff investigated these concerns and concluded that the issues are primarily connected to a lack of communication between PG&E and the concerned Sonoma County parties, resulting in PG&E's misunderstanding of the other parties' views.

PG&E representatives should meet and confer with staff from Congressman Thompson's and Assemblyman Chesbro's offices, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors, and the concerned local residents to address the concerns of Sonoma County parties. Additionally, the Commission staff requests that PG&E revises the Vegetation Management section(s) of PG&E's website to include information on the Project, as requested by the Sonoma County parties.

Attached are the CPUC staff notes from the field visit, summarizing the concerns raised by the Sonoma County parties. Please do not hesitate to contact Energy Division or Safety and Enforcement Division, if you have additional questions or would like additional information about our electric safety activities. The primary contact for this issue is Raymond Fugere at raymond.fugere@cpuc.ca.gov or 213-576-7015.

Sincerely,

Edward Randolph
Director, Energy Division

Elizaveta Malashenko
Deputy Director, Safety and Enforcement Division

Cc: U.S. Representative for California's 5th congressional district, Charles Michael Thompson
California Assemblymember for the 2nd district, Wesley Chesbro
Brigadier General (CA) Jack Hagan, Director, Safety and Enforcement Division
Raymond Fugere, Supervisor, Safety and Enforcement Division
Lynn Sadler, Director, Office of Governmental Affairs

Right of Way Reclamation Project
CPUC Staff Notes from Field Visit June 18 and June 19, 2013

Endangered/Threatened Species

California Red Legged Frog:

The California Red Legged Frog (Rana draytonii) is listed and protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act (FESA). Section 9 of FESA prohibits the "taking" of a listed species by anyone, including private individuals, and State and local agencies. **Take**, as defined by FESA, means "to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct." **Harm** includes not only the direct taking of a species itself, but the destruction or modification of the species' habitat resulting in the potential injury of the species. Portions of the Project bisect habitat areas of the California Red Legged Frog, and PG&E's trimming/removals in the area, may degrade habitat through increased sedimentation, modification of in stream and streamside habitat structure and shade, changed patterns of runoff, modification of uplands and changes in the population structure of forage species.

Steelhead:

Steelhead (Onchorhynchus mykiss) was listed as a threatened species on August 18, 1997; threatened status reaffirmed on January 5, 2006. While the areas targeted by the Project are not known to contain Steelhead, their headwaters flow directly into listed critical habitat of the Steelhead. The riparian oak woodlands PG&E has targeted for removal are important to maintaining a natural and healthy riparian zone around the stream channels and their associated drainages. This appears to be vital for maintaining water quality downstream for the Steelheed as well as the forage species they depend on. The losses of riparian vegetation and increased sedimentation in the water have been identified as a primary cause of habitat degradation in the range of steelhead. The effects of sedimentation on the Steelhead include: clogging and abrasion of respiratory surfaces; adhering to the chorion of eggs; providing conditions conducive to entry and persistence of disease-related organisms; behavioral modifications; smothering life stages; altering water chemistry; degrading downstream habitat by scouring and filling of pools and riffles and changing bedload composition; reducing photosynthetic growth and primary production; and affecting intergravel permeability and dissolved oxygen levels.

Soil Retention

The shallow water table in the Sonoma can result in failure prone supersaturated soil conditions to develop rapidly following early season rains that persist until early summer, leading to unstable slopes. Many of the root systems associated with these trees involved with the Project took over a century to develop and appear to have specific characteristics that are critical to slope stabilization in the area. Oak trees are known to develop several deep main roots that can extend up to 36 feet into the ground, where groundwater is present. The roots have proven ideally suited to anchoring the overlying erosive soils to the underlying sheared shale's and preventing slope failures. Newly planted vegetation would not have as deep of a root structure and would need to be tall enough to resist grazing pressure and short enough

not to interfere with the power lines. Currently, suggested alternative vegetation does not have the deep root structure needed to combat the geotechnical hazards associated with the site and in practice has already been proven incapable of stabilizing the slopes in the area.

Flood Control

The area involved in the Project is hilly and contains step slopes. These slopes can cause water, debris and dirt to move in nearby streams and rivers. Specifically, there are concerns that the debris and dirt could affect the Payran Reach of the City Petaluma. There is a possibility that the debris into the Payran Reach would negatively affect the City of Petaluma's flood control. Furthermore, any actions that affect the flood control could potentially worsen a known specific hazard within this portion of the Federal Emergency Management Agency 2A flood zone thereby jeopardizing life and property.

Overall Scope and Transparency of Project

Residents and officials expressed concern over PG&E's overall Project scope and the transparency of PG&E's vegetation management and environmental practices in general.