3. Introduction to the Initial Study

3.1 Proposed Project Overview

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E), a regulated California utility, filed an application with the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) on November 30, 2011, for a Permit to Construct (PTC) the Cressey-Gallo 115 kilovolt (kV) Power Line Project (Proposed Project). The application was deemed complete by the CPUC on December 21, 2011.

PG&E is proposing to construct a new, approximately 14.4-mile-long, single-circuit power line needed to improve transmission system reliability for customers in north-central Merced County, California. The project would interconnect PG&E's existing Cressey and Gallo Substations to form a power line loop with two other area substations (Livingston and Atwater). The new transmission loop would allow power to flow from another direction when there is an outage on a line feeding the loop, avoiding customer service interruptions from single-line outages in this area. As proposed by PG&E, the project includes:

- Constructing a new, approximately 14.4-mile, single-circuit 115 kV power line interconnecting Cressey Substation and Gallo Substation.
- Upgrading the bus configurations at Cressey Substation and replacing the existing radial power line transition into the substation within the existing substation property.
- Expanding Gallo Substation to add switchgear and upgrade the bus configurations.

The Proposed Project is located in the San Joaquin Valley in Merced County near the community of Cressey and the City of Livingston, California. The project route is oriented primarily east to-west between Cressey Substation and Gallo Substation, intersecting with State Route 99 (SR-99) south of the City of Livingston. The project would connect Cressey Substation (located at the southeast corner of West Lane and Meadow Drive, approximately 2 miles east of the community of Cressey) to an expanded Gallo Substation (located on the property of the Gallo Winery facility at 18000 River Road, approximately 4 miles west of the City of Livingston).

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

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 or deny the PTC.

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 PG&E'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 Resources
- Air Quality
- Greenhouse Gases
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Traffic and Transportation
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Mandatory Findings of Significance
- Corona and Induced Current Effects

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 PG&E must implement as part of the project, actions required to implement these measures, monitoring requirements, and timing of implementation for each measure.
- Appendix A: References. Lists the sources of information used to prepare the IS.
- Appendix B: Report Preparation. Lists the preparers of the IS.
- Appendix C: Biological Resources Technical Report
- Appendix D: Construction and Operation Emissions