

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) has prepared this document to respond to comments provided on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Estrella Substation and Paso Robles Area Reinforcement Project (Proposed Project), and to identify changes to the text of the DEIR. This includes responses to comments submitted on the recirculated portions of the DEIR. This document has been prepared in compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970 (as amended) and the CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 15000 et seq.). Together with Volumes 1 and 2, this document constitutes the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Proposed Project.

1.1 Format and Organization of this Document

This “Comments and Responses to Comments” document contains the following components:

- **Chapter 1, *Introduction*.** This chapter describes the organization of the document and its preparation. This chapter also contains information on the public review period for the DEIR and the recirculated portions of the DEIR, and the FEIR certification process.
- **Chapter 2, *Master Responses*.** This chapter contains the master responses prepared in response to comments received on the DEIR and the recirculated portions of the DEIR. As described in Section **Error! Reference source not found.**, a total of 131 comment letters were received during the public review period for the DEIR, and 6 comment letters were received during the public review period for the recirculated portions of the DEIR. Many of these letters raised similar concerns. As such, master responses were prepared to eliminate repetitiveness in responding to similar comments and to address the shared concerns and comments received during the public review periods.
- **Chapter 3, *Individual Responses to Comments*.** This chapter contains written responses to individual comments raising significant environmental issues received on the DEIR and recirculated portions of the DEIR. In many cases, where appropriate, responses to individual comments within comment letters refer the reader to the applicable master response(s), which are contained in Chapter 2. Chapter 3, *Individual Responses to Comments* contains a list of the persons, agencies, and organizations that provided comment letters on the DEIR and/or the recirculated portions of the DEIR.
- **Chapter 4, *Revisions to the DEIR*.** This chapter describes and presents revisions to the DEIR. Revisions to the DEIR were either made in response to comments received or were initiated by CPUC.

- **Chapter 5, Report Preparation.** This chapter lists the individuals who assisted in the preparation of Volume 3 of the FEIR.
- **Chapter 6, References.** This chapter lists the references cited in Volume 3 of the FEIR.

Note that the Mitigation Monitoring and Report Program (MMRP) for the Proposed Project is Appendix F in Volume 2 of the FEIR.

1.2 Public Review of the Draft Environmental Impact Report

The public review period for the DEIR began on December 8, 2020 with the filing of the Notice of Completion (NOC) with the State Clearinghouse and the distribution and posting of the Notice of Availability (NOA). The NOA was sent to all trustee agencies and any person or organization requesting a copy. CPUC also posted the NOA on its website along with the electronic DEIR files. The public review period for the DEIR was initially scheduled to last 55 days, to close on February 1, 2021. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and requests for additional time, the CPUC extended the review period three weeks until February 22, 2021. In total, the public review period lasted for 76 days. The notice of extension of the public review period for the DEIR is posted on CPUC's website¹.

During the public review period for the DEIR, CPUC held two public meetings. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings were conducted virtually via Zoom to avoid in-person gatherings. Both meetings were held on December 15, 2020; one at midday (12 pm to 2 pm) and one in the evening (5:30 pm to 7:30 pm). The meetings each featured the same content, including a presentation by CPUC describing the Proposed Project, reasonably foreseeable distribution components, alternatives, and the analysis and conclusions set forth in the DEIR. The meetings provided an opportunity for meeting attendees to provide oral comments and ask questions. Copies of the meeting presentation slides and recordings of the meetings are available for download/viewing on CPUC's website².

CPUC received a total of 131 letters containing comments on the environmental analysis during the public review period for the DEIR. Letters were submitted by state elected representatives and local agencies; additional stakeholders, such as the Proposed Project applicants, homeowners associations (HOAs), law firms representing a union labor group and local businesses, and environmental organizations; and individual members of the public. No federal agencies submitted comments on the DEIR. Refer to Chapter 3, *Individual Responses to*

¹ Available:

https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/horizonh2o/estrella/docs/CPUC_Estrella_Project_DEIR_REVIEW_EXTENSION_SIGNED.pdf

² See: <https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/horizonh2o/estrella/index.html>

Comments for copies of the letters submitted during the public review period and the list of persons, agencies and organizations that submitted comment letters.

1.3 Recirculation of Portions of the Draft Environmental Impact Report

Based on several comments received on the DEIR, the CPUC decided to revise and recirculate portions of the document. Specifically, CPUC received a comment letter from Horizon West Transmission (HWT) (one of the Proposed Project applicants) identifying substantive changes to the Proposed Project. Additionally, CPUC received comments from Adams Broadwell Joseph & Cardozo (Adams Broadwell), on behalf of California Unions for Reliable Energy (CURE), raising concerns regarding the DEIR’s air quality analysis, as well as comments from Pacific Gas & Electric Company (PG&E) (another of the Proposed Project applicants). In accordance with Section 15088.5 of the CEQA Guidelines, CPUC determined that the new information brought to light by HWT, Adams Broadwell, and PG&E merited modification and recirculation of the following portions of the DEIR:

- Chapter 2, *Project Description*
- Section 4.2, “Agricultural Resources”
- Section 4.3, “Air Quality”

The revisions to these portions of the DEIR were presented in underline/~~strikeout~~ to denote the changes and allow the public to comment. The comments leading to the recirculation and the reasoning for the recirculation are described in detail in the recirculated DEIR document, which is available on the CPUC’s Estrella Project webpage.

1.4 Public Review of the Recirculated Portions of the Draft Environmental Impact Report

The recirculated portions of the DEIR were available for public review for a total of 55 days, from November 18, 2021 to January 12, 2022. CPUC followed all the same noticing procedures described for the original DEIR in Section 1.2. Specifically, CPUC filed a NOC, along with the recirculated DEIR files, with the State Clearinghouse. CPUC also sent a NOA for the recirculated portions of the DEIR to all property owners within 1,000 feet of the Proposed Project or alternatives components; all trustee agencies; individuals who submitted comments during previous public review periods for the Proposed Project, and any person or organization

requesting a copy. CPUC posted the NOA on its website along with the electronic recirculated DEIR files³.

A total of 6 comment letters were received during the review period. Refer to Chapter 3, *Individual Responses to Comments* for copies of the letters submitted during the public review period for the recirculated portions of the DEIR and a list of persons, agencies and organizations that submitted comment letters.

1.5 Preparation of the Final Environmental Impact Report

Preparation of the FEIR involved preparing responses to comments received during the public review period for the DEIR and the recirculated portions of the DEIR, and revising the DEIR text in response to comments. Comments were responded to either through master responses (for common recurring themes) or through individual responses to comments, or a combination of the two. Comment letters were assigned a letter code (e.g., A or AA) and individual comments within the unique comment letters were bracketed and numbered (e.g., A-1, A-2, etc.). The comment letters and individual comments received on the recirculated portions of the DEIR are denoted with an “R.” (e.g., Comment Letter R.A; Comment R.A-1, etc.). Copies of the unique comment letters and associated responses to comments are provided in Chapter 3 of this document. Revisions to the DEIR text are shown in Volumes 1 and 2 of the FEIR, with substantive changes from the original DEIR/recirculated DEIR text⁴ shown in underline/strikeout, and are also shown in Chapter 4 of this Volume 3 document.

1.6 Final Environmental Impact Report Review and Certification

The FEIR will be posted on CPUC’s website and all public agencies that submitted comments on the DEIR and/or recirculated DEIR will be notified of the FEIR’s availability at least 10 days before its certification. After the close of the 10-day public agency review period, CPUC will consider the Environmental Impact Report (EIR), staff recommendations, and public testimony, and decide whether to certify the EIR and whether to approve or deny the Proposed Project or approve one of the alternative combinations. If CPUC chooses to certify the EIR and approve the Proposed Project or one of the alternative combinations, it will file a Notice of Determination (NOD) with the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) (14 CCR 15093[c]). Because the EIR has identified significant and unavoidable impacts from the Proposed Project and alternative

³ See: <https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/horizonh2o/estrella/RDEIR.html>

⁴ In this FEIR, the revisions from the recirculated portions of the DEIR have been accepted. Thus, any revisions in Volumes 1 and 2 of this FEIR are new revisions that have not already been made as part of the recirculation.

combinations, a statement of overriding considerations would be required as part of the record of project or alternative approval (14 CCR 15093[c]).

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