

Chapter 1. Introduction

PROJECT PROPONENT

The demand for communications network capacity in the United States has increased dramatically over the past 15 years and is expected to continue to increase at a rapid pace over the next decade. From 1992 to 1997, the total interstate switched access minutes (i.e., minutes transmitted by long-distance carriers that also use the distribution networks of local telephone carriers) increased by 154% (an average of 20.5% annually) from 195.4 million minutes to 497.3 million minutes, (Federal Communications Commission 1999). To accommodate this traffic, as well as increased traffic associated with video and data transfers and other sources, telecommunications companies have incorporated more effective technologies into their networks. One of the most widely used technologies has been fiber optic cable. In 1993, a total of 7.7 million miles of fiber optic cable had been deployed nationwide by incumbent local exchange carriers and competitive access providers. Over the next 4 years, the total mileage deployed increased 105% (an average of 19.7% annually) to 15.8 million miles, (Federal Communications Commission 1999).

Long-distance revenues in the United States are projected to increase by 30 to 40% over the next decade, from \$90 billion in 1999 to \$120 billion in 2010 (Center for Telecommunications Management 1999). This increase in revenue is expected to occur while prices for telecommunications services decrease. An increase in the volume of long-distance voice, video, and data transmissions will offset declining prices, with growth in volume exceeding the 30 to 40% growth in revenue. The volume of telecommunications use is growing rapidly because of increasing population size and increases in available applications (i.e., type of services). For example, by 2010, the number of telecommuters in the United States is expected to increase by 100 to 150%, 10 to 15% of all retail shopping is expected to be conducted through home personal computers, and 10 to 20% of households are expected to use simultaneous voice-video communications (Center for Telecommunications Management 1999).

California ranks first in the United States in both population and demand for telecommunications bandwidth, which has already exceeded the capability of existing telecommunications facilities in many areas of the state (Ridley-Thomas 1998). To maintain its robust economy and status as a leader in computer technology, California will require rapid deployment of state-of-the-art fiber optic cable facilities. To satisfy this demand, Williams Communications, Inc. (Williams) plans to construct an integral portion of its nationwide fiber optic cable network in California. Williams currently operates one of the largest fiber optic cable networks in the United States, with facilities extending more than 18,000 miles through 37 states. Williams also plans to construct, lease, or purchase more than 14,000 additional miles of fiber optic cable facilities throughout the country, including California. Although in terms of mileage the fiber optic cable facilities planned in California (1,000 to 2,000 miles) are only a fraction of the overall network, the portion of Williams' fiber optic cable network planned for California is critical to the success of the company's nationwide network plan. **Figure 1-1** shows the location of the proposed Point Arena to Robbins project route and the proposed Point Arena to Sacramento project route in relationship to other Williams project routes in California. California's position as a leader in computer technology (e.g., Silicon Valley), its role as a center of the entertainment industry (generating video transmission), and the state's vibrant business environment require high-capacity telecommunications facilities. California's position on the west coast makes it a portal for the transmission of information between the United States, Asia, and the Pacific rim,

and several crucial project routes for Williams' planned facilities in California will interconnect directly to new intercontinental fiber optic cables linking the United States to Asia.

RELATIONSHIP TO THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT AND CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION-APPROVAL OF THE INITIAL STUDY/MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

On October 21, 1999, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) approved an initial study/mitigated negative declaration (IS/MND) for Williams' Fiber Optic Cable System Installation Project - California Network (California Public Utilities Commission 1999). A subsequent IS/MND is required when an IS/MND has already been adopted and "substantial changes" are proposed to a project that would result in the "involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects" but where the project proponent commits to measures that would mitigate these new effects to a less-than-significant level (CEQA Guidelines Section 15162). As a subsequent IS/MND, the CPUC-approved IS/MND is incorporated in this document by reference.

The Point Arena to Robbins project described in this document is a modification to a project route approved in the previous California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) document.

A Point Arena to Sacramento project was identified as a future project in the previous CEQA document. The proposed Point Arena to Sacramento project route provides a diverse connection between Point Arena and Sacramento to supplement the similar Point Arena to Robbins project route. The Point Arena to Sacramento project route uses approximately 53 miles of the CPUC- and CEQA-approved Point Arena to Sacramento project. As previously approved, the project route begins at the AT&T Corp. cable landing near Point Arena in Mendocino County and continues east on State Route 128. At the junction of State Route 128 and Mountain House Road, the current project diverges from and replaces the originally approved project route and follows a new route to a route terminus in Sacramento. Therefore, this document assesses the portion of the project route not included in the previous CEQA document and approved by the CPUC.

CEQA LEAD AND RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

Because the projects are located in California, it is subject to the requirements of the CEQA. The CPUC is the designated state lead agency for review of these projects under CEQA. This subsequent IS/MND prepared for the projects may be used, depending on the need for discretionary permits, by other agencies or governmental entities, including, but not limited to, the following:

- # air pollution control and air quality management districts;
- # California Coastal Commission;
- # California Department of Fish and Game;
- # California Department of Transportation;
- # state regional water quality control boards;
- # California State Lands Commission;
- # California State Reclamation Board;
- # California State Water Resources Control Board; and
- # local counties, cities, and special districts.

This subsequent IS/MND has been prepared pursuant to CEQA (Cal. Pub. Res. Code 21000 et seq.), the recently amended State CEQA Guidelines (14 CCR 15000 et seq.), and the CPUC CEQA rules (Rules 17.1, 17.2, and 17.3).

The project routes cross many jurisdictions and will require approvals and permits from various federal, state, and local agencies for specific portions of the project routes and associated facilities. Portions of the project routes are also subject to compliance with federal environmental regulations, including, but not limited to, the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), National Environmental Policy Act, Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of the Point Arena to Robbins project route and the Point Arena to Sacramento project route is to connect Williams' overall fiber optic network to an existing undersea cable landing at Point Arena. This will provide Williams access to international telecommunications traffic between the United States and Asia. As an integral part of Williams' network in California, general objectives of the California network also apply to the Point Arena to Robbins project route and the Point Arena to Sacramento project route. Williams' objectives for construction of the fiber optic cable network in California are to:

- # provide needed fiber optic cable telecommunications capacity within California through the installation of a new fiber optic cable network;
- # expand California's national and international telecommunications access and the reliability of that access through diverse links; and
- # avoid or mitigate to less-than-significant levels any significant impacts on California's environment through the careful siting of the project routes and associated facilities (i.e., optical amplification/regenerator stations) and use of special construction methods where applicable (e.g., installation in existing road right-of-way; directional boring).

The installation of Williams' proposed projects from Point Arena to Robbins and from Point Arena to Sacramento and the overall fiber optic cable network in California will provide several benefits to the state and consumers of telecommunications services, including:

- # enhancing the capability and reliability of California's telecommunications infrastructure;
- # addressing existing and future demand for telecommunications services in California and the nation;
- # creating competitive pressures on existing telecommunications carriers to maintain low prices and good service;
- # providing high-quality, secure, reliable, competitively priced telecommunications services using state-of-the-art fiber optic cable technology; and
- # providing customers with innovative, customized services designed to meet specific customer needs and expanding the availability of technologically advanced services in California.

SCOPE OF THIS EXPANDED SUBSEQUENT INITIAL STUDY/ MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

The CPUC, as the state lead agency under CEQA, must comply with the environmental review process described in the State CEQA Guidelines. This subsequent IS/MND follows the recently amended CEQA environmental checklist (**Appendix A**) and guidelines and analyzes in detail those resource issues that have

been identified as possibly significant from implementation of the projects. A brief discussion is also provided for each entry on the environmental checklist form in which the projects either would not have an impact or would have a less-than-significant impact on the environment.

The CPUC is responsible for preparing the environmental documentation under CEQA. This subsequent IS/MND documents the extensive coordination between Williams and the CPUC and other state and federal agencies and their requirements for compliance with applicable federal, state, and local permits, approvals, laws, and regulations. A list of the permits and approvals required for the projects are presented in **Appendix B**. **Appendix C** contains information about areas along the project routes under the jurisdiction of the California State Lands Commission, a responsible agency under CEQA.

This subsequent IS/MND also documents compliance with the appropriate federal and state ESAs, CWA, and NHPA and coordination with responsible, trustee, and cooperating agencies on the project routes. Endangered species issues are currently being coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. A separate wetland delineation report has been prepared for each of the project routes, which were submitted to and verified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to support authorization of Nationwide Permit No. 12 (**Appendix D**). Compliance with the NHPA requires additional activities summarized in this subsequent IS/MND, such as preparation of a cultural resources inventory report, evaluation of some cultural resources, and consultation between federal agencies and the State Historic Preservation Officer. Documentation in compliance with NHPA will be provided in a separate cultural resources inventory report.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS SUBSEQUENT IS/MND

This subsequent IS/MND analyzes the Point Arena to Robbins and Point Arena to Sacramento project routes on a “programmatic” level (i.e., as a whole at a broad level of detail) for some resource topics and on a site-specific basis where appropriate for other topics (e.g., biological and cultural resources), according to the most current available information. This subsequent IS/MND is organized in two volumes.

Volume I consists of the following:

- # The “Executive Summary” chapter briefly describes the projects, impacts and their significance, and programmatic and route-specific mitigation measures.
- # Chapter 1, “Introduction”, describes the purpose, need, and objectives of the Williams’ projects.
- # Chapter 2, “Project Description”, describes the construction methods that will be employed and the project features (i.e., mitigation) that have been incorporated into the projects to avoid impacts or reduce potentially significant impacts to less-than-significant levels.
- # Chapter 3, “Project Route Descriptions”, describes, in more detail, the Point Arena to Robbins and Point Arena to Sacramento project routes and related facilities that comprise the projects.
- # Chapter 4A, “Environmental Setting for Point Arena to Robbins”, describes existing conditions (i.e., setting) at both programmatic and site-specific levels for the Point Arena to Robbins project route. The chapter is organized by the order of resource topics in the CEQA initial study checklist.

- # Chapter 4B, “Environmental Setting for Point Arena to Sacramento”, describes existing conditions (i.e., setting) at both programmatic and site-specific levels for the Point Arena to Sacramento project route. The chapter is organized by the order of resource topics in the CEQA initial study checklist.
- # Chapter 5A, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Robbins”, analyzes the environmental impacts of the Point Arena to Robbins project and recommended mitigation measures. These are mitigation measures above and beyond those incorporated into the project design as described in Chapter 2, “Project Description”. Resource topics are discussed in the order they appear in Chapter 4, “Environmental Setting”, and in the CEQA initial study checklist. Resource areas that would not be affected by the project are discussed briefly and then eliminated from further analysis. A completed master initial study checklist is provided in **Appendix A**.
- # Chapter 5B, “Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures for Point Arena to Sacramento”, analyzes the environmental impacts of the Point Arena to Sacramento project and recommended mitigation measures. These are mitigation measures above and beyond those incorporated into the project design as described in Chapter 2, “Project Description”. Resource topics are discussed in the order they appear in Chapter 4, “Environmental Setting”, and in the CEQA initial study checklist. Resource areas that would not be affected by the project are discussed briefly and then eliminated from further analysis. A completed master initial study checklist is provided in **Appendix A**.
- # Chapter 6, “Citations”, is a list of all sources cited in the document.
- # Chapter 7, “Report Preparers”, identifies all individuals involved in preparation of this subsequent IS/MND.

Volume II, “Technical Appendices”, contains the CEQA environmental checklist; a list of all the required permits and approvals; scoping information; technical reports; and other general, program, and route-specific background information, technical data, and field survey results for both project routes.