

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

505 VAN NESS AVENUE
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94102-3298



July 25, 2011

Mr. Mark Cassady
TRC, Inc.
Senior Biologist
80 Stone Pine Rd # 200
Half Moon Bay, CA 94019

Subject: Atascadero - San Luis Obispo 70kV Power Line Reconductoring Project Variance Request #1 for Alternate Helicopter Landing Area near the Reservoir Canyon Staging Area

Dear Mr. Cassady:

We have reviewed Variance Request #1, which Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) submitted on July 8, 2011 for the Atascadero - San Luis Obispo 70kV Power Line Reconductoring Project (Project) and have determined that the proposed staging area will not have significant new or greater environmental impacts than analyzed in the approved IS/MND for the project, pursuant to the description and analysis presented in this letter.

Proposed Action

PG&E is requesting approval of an alternate staging area and helicopter landing zone at the Reservoir Canyon Staging Area that is further away from nesting birds that occur within the riparian area of San Luis Obispo Creek. The alternate staging area would be approximately 850 feet by 350 feet in size and is shown in Attachment A (PG&E's Variance Request). The new staging area would be accessed via an existing access road as shown in Attachment A. The preparation and use of the staging area and landing zone will be the same as for the original staging area at Reservoir Canyon. Existing restrictions on helicopter use during high traffic hours will apply with helicopter use between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Helicopters will not fly over Highway 101 with suspended loads. No stockpiling will be allowed within a marked area around the CCWA drain vent structures within the new staging area boundary. PG&E obtained permission from the landowner to use this landing zone and the landing area and flying over residents will not be allowed in compliance with the waiver from the Lift Plan per FAA requirements. Any mowing occurring at the site will occur between sunrise and 10:00 a.m. in compliance with the recommendations by the CDF.

CPUC Analysis of Environmental Impacts

RMT, Inc. (RMT) and I reviewed the Variance Request (Attachment A) and Supplemental Information (Attachment B). PG&E provided adequate information to determine that the new staging area would have no new significant impacts.

Biological and Cultural Resources. The site was surveyed for biological resources on June 30 and July 1, 2011. No special status plant species and no nesting birds within 250 feet for non-raptors and 500 feet for raptors were identified. The RMT biologist concurred that the buffers are adequate

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for protection of nesting birds. The area was also surveyed for cultural resources and no resources were identified.

Traffic, Noise, and Air Quality. PG&E consulted with Caltrans and determined that no changes to the encroachment permit are required. The helicopters will be landed at the far southern end of the staging area, furthest away and screened from the highway while still maintaining any nesting bird buffers. The existing restrictions on landing time will be implemented to ensure no new or greater impacts to traffic than were analyzed in the approved IS/MND for the project. The alternate landing zone will not generate any greater noise impacts as it is further away from residents than the Reservoir Canyon Staging Area. Air impacts would be the same as analyzed in the IS/MND as the landing zone as use of the alternate landing zone and staging area would not result in any increases in flights or equipment usage. Little to no ground disturbance that could generate dust would be required for the new staging area.

Visual Impacts. Visual impacts would be the same as for the proposed project. The helicopter would land as far south as possible to maintain nesting bird restrictions to minimize views from the highway. The visual impacts would be less than significant as analyzed in the approved IS/MND for the project.

Hazardous Materials, Hydrology, and Utilities. All hazardous material storage would be contained in the same manner as proposed and analyzed in the approved IS/MND. All measures for hazardous material storage applicable to the Reservoir Canyon Staging area would be applicable to the alternate site. The site will be mowed in morning hours to minimize fire hazard risks, as analyzed in the approved IS/MND. The site is further from the riparian habitat and waterway than the original staging area. Runoff and contamination of waterways would not be significant with implementation of measures included in the IS/MND. The CCWA water pipeline vent would be marked and avoided to ensure no impacts to the utility structure.

Approval

Variance Request #1 for the alternate staging area and helicopter landing zone at Reservoir Canyon is approved and is subject to all mitigation measures pertinent to the project as listed in the approved IS/MND for the project. Please contact me or Tania Treis of RMT if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Lisa Orsaba

CPUC Project Manager

Cc: Andrew Martin, RMT, Inc.
Judi Mosely, PG&E attorney

Attachment 1: Variance #1 Request Submittal

Attachment 2: Supplemental Information from PG&E