
State Water Resources Control Board

NOTICE OF INFORMAL CONSULTATION WITH RESPONSIBLE AND TRUSTEE AGENCIES REGARDING AN ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT FOR WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION

BALCH HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION PROJECT NO. 2735

To: Responsible and Trustee Agencies, and Interested Persons

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) plans to prepare an environmental document for Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E) Balch Hydroelectric Project (Project) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Pub. Res. Code, § 21000 et seq.) and the CEQA Guidelines (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15000 et seq.). The Project is located on the North Fork Kings River in Fresno County, approximately 40 miles northeast of the City of Fresno. Project facilities are depicted in the attached map and a more detailed description is provided in the *Project Description* section below.

The Project is licensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), which issues licenses for the operation of hydroelectric projects for 30 to 50 years. PG&E filed a final license application on April 18, 2024. PG&E currently operates the Project under a license that expires on April 30, 2026. FERC is required to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act as part of its licensing decision for the Project.

In accordance with section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act, PG&E must apply for a water quality certification (certification) for the Project.

NOTICE OF INFORMAL CONSULTATION

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15063, subdivision (g), notice is hereby given that the State Water Board is conducting informal consultation with responsible and trustee agencies (agencies) to solicit input on the Project's CEQA process. While it is not required by CEQA, the State Water Board will accept similar input and supporting information from other interested entities and persons. Recipients of this notice are encouraged to share this notice with other agencies representatives and interested persons.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek input from the agencies responsible for resources affected by the Project and hear from other interested parties. **The State Water Board would like to obtain recommendations, rationale, and supporting information regarding whether an Environmental Impact Report or a Negative Declaration should be prepared.**

Recommendations and supporting information should be provided by the deadline in the *Consultation Deadline and Contact* section of this notice.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | ERIC OPPENHEIMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Project includes: Balch Diversion Dam (a 135-foot-high concrete arch dam) and its associated reservoir, Black Rock Reservoir (967 usable acre-feet); Balch Afterbay Dam (a 165-foot-high concrete arch dam) and its associated reservoir, Balch Afterbay (135 usable acre-feet); and Balch Nos. 1 and 2 powerhouses, with a combined generating capacity of 131.52-megawatts. Water released from Black Rock Reservoir, or spilled over Balch Diversion Dam, flows approximately five miles to Balch Afterbay. Alternatively, at Black Rock Reservoir, a portion of the water is diverted via a series of tunnels and penstocks to the Balch Nos. 1 and 2 powerhouses, which discharge into Balch Afterbay. Water in Balch Afterbay is either diverted to the Kings River Powerhouse¹ or continues down the North Fork Kings River to Pine Flat Reservoir. The Black Rock Creek and Weir Creek Feeders have been out of service since 2012 and PG&E plans to decommission both facilities as part of the Project relicensing. While PG&E proposes no changes to Project operations or new construction, it proposes to implement new protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures related to the protection of resources, including but not limited to management of biological resources, hazardous materials, and recreation. The Project's FERC boundary area encompasses approximately 650 acres and overlaps with the Haas-Kings Hydroelectric Project boundary. See Attachment 1 for a map of the Project area.

The State Water Board will use the CEQA analysis to support its decision of whether to issue certification and if so, under what conditions. Certification issuance requires analysis of a project's overall effect on water quality and an analysis of whether the designated beneficial uses identified in the appropriate water quality control plan(s) are adequately protected.

CONSULTATION DEADLINE AND CONTACT

The State Water Board will accept written input on the type of environmental document that should be developed for the Project (e.g., negative declaration, environmental impact report) and supporting information **until 12:00 p.m. (noon) on December 2, 2024**. Written input should specifically identify that it is provided as part of the "Balch CEQA Section 15063(g) Informal Consultation" and include recommendations as to the type of CEQA document that should be prepared as well as the rationale and supporting information for the recommendation. Written input may be submitted electronically or by mail to:

Email: Wr401program@waterboards.ca.gov

or

Mail to:

State Water Resources Control Board
Division of Water Rights – Water Quality Certification Program
Attn: Derek Wadsworth
P.O. Box 2000
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000

¹ Part of the Haas-Kings Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 1988).

If you have questions regarding this notice please contact Derek Wadsworth, Project Manager, by email to: Derek.Wadsworth@waterboards.ca.gov.

Parker Thaler

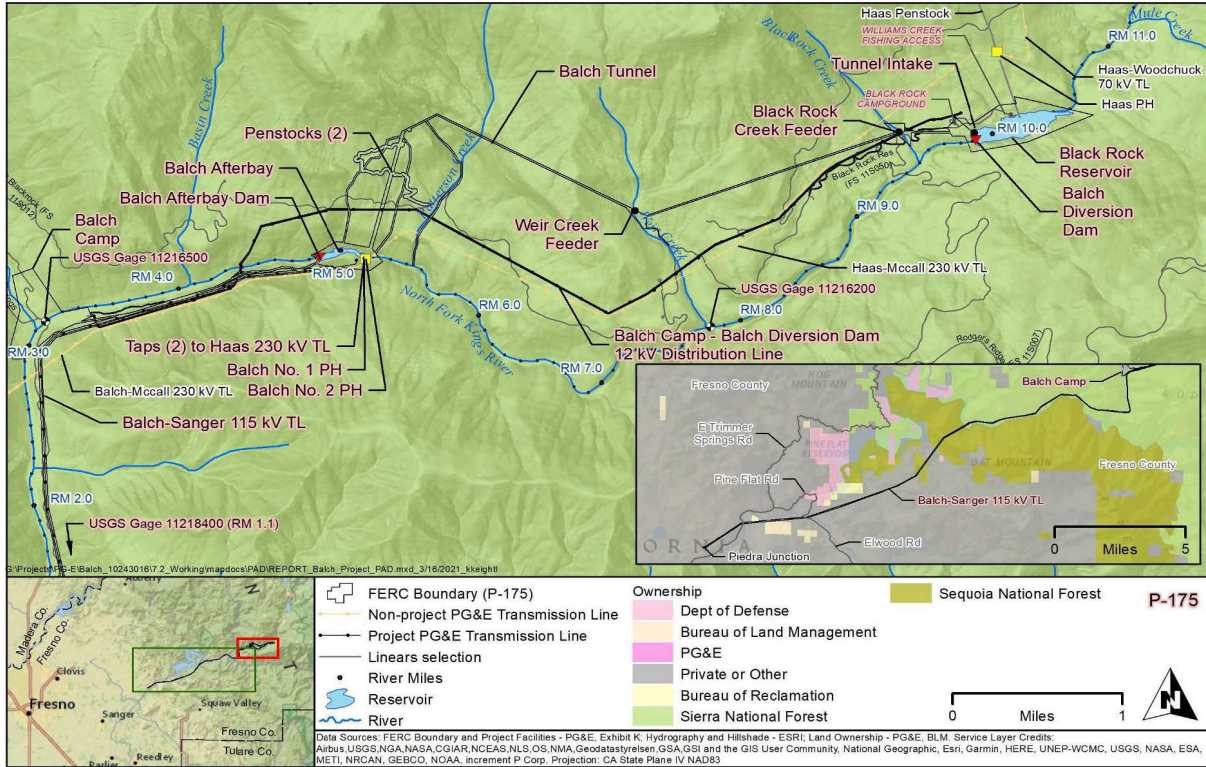
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Water Quality Certification Program Manager
Division of Water Rights

11/4/24

Date

Attachments: (1) Balch Hydroelectric Project Vicinity Map
 (2) Distribution List

Attachment 1: Balch Hydroelectric Project Vicinity Map*



* Image from PG&E's Balch Hydroelectric Project [Website](https://balchrelicensing.com/).²

² PG&E's Project website is available at <https://balchrelicensing.com/> with a password of "pge2021!". The map image above is [available](#) for download under the "Reference Library" header, and "Maps" sub-header.

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Via eFile to Docket No. P-175

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