



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
WEST COAST REGION
650 Capitol Mall, Suite 5-100
Sacramento, California 95814-4706

November 10, 2015

In response refer to:
WF:WCR:FERC P-803

Mr. Jeff Wetzel
State Water Resources Control Board
Division of Water Rights
P.O. Box 2000
Sacramento, CA 95812-2000

Re: NOAA Fisheries Service's Comments on Pacific Gas and Electric Company's Petition for Reconsideration of the State Water Resources Control Board's Water Quality Certification for the DeSabra-Centerville Hydroelectric Project, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Project No. 803, Butte Creek and West Branch Feather River, California.

Dear Mr. Wetzel:

NOAA Fisheries Service (NMFS) has reviewed Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E) May 8th, 2015, Petition for Reconsideration (Petition) of the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB) Final Water Quality Certification (WQC) for the DeSabra-Centerville Hydroelectric Project, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Project No. 803 (Project).

NMFS is concerned with the following anadromous and resident salmonid fish resources in Butte Creek affected by the Project: The federally threatened distinct population segment of California Central Valley steelhead (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) and its designated critical habitat; the federally threatened evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) of Central Valley (CV) spring-run Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*) and its designated critical habitat; the ESU of CV fall-run Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*); and resident *O. mykiss*.

NMFS disagrees with most of the concerns expressed in the Petition. However, we agree with PG&E that the Operations Group, which implements the annual Operations and Management Plan for the Project, should be limited to staff from the Resource Agencies and PG&E. Nevertheless, we believe that the remaining conditions in the WQC are sufficient to protect anadromous and resident salmonid fish resources in Butte Creek. We provide comments regarding PG&E's Petition in Enclosure A.



Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments. If you have questions regarding this correspondence, please contact William Foster at 916-930-3617.

Sincerely,



Steve Edmondson
FERC Branch Supervisor
NMFS, West Coast Region

Enclosures

cc: FERC Service List for FERC Project No. 803

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20426

Ms. Pamela Creedon, Executive Officer
Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board
11020 Sun Center Drive, Suite 200
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Ms. Judi K. Mosley, Law Department
Pacific Gas and Electric Company
P.O. Box 7442
San Francisco, CA 94120

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

Pacific Gas and Electric Company)
DeSabra-Centerville Hydroelectric Project)
Butte Creek & West Branch Feather River)

Project No. 803

NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE'S COMMENTS ON
PG&E'S PETITION FOR RECONSIDERATION
OF THE SWRCB'S WQC FOR THE PROJECT

Petition, Part C, Page 7:

*WQC Condition 3: Stream and Reservoir Gaging. [Specifically, page 29 of the WQC]:
"The Licensee shall operate and maintain the existing PG&E gages identified in the attached
Table 3 (Table B2.6-1 of the license application)."*

PG&E disagrees with using particular stream flow gages.

NMFS: NMFS supports the SWRCB's decision to implement real-time flow and temperature measurement on Butte Creek. Successful operation of the Project to benefit CV spring-run Chinook salmon and CCV steelhead requires the most current flow, reservoir storage, and water temperature information available. Providing information in real-time will improve decision making within the Operations Group and provide information quickly and transparently to the Resource Agencies, to non-government organizations (NGOs) not in the Operations Group, as well as the general public. The USGS flow gages, as well as the SRCB's proposed water temperature gages, are crucial to the management of the Project and should be maintained in perpetuity.

Petition, Part D, Pages 7-8:

WQC Condition 9: DeSabra Forebay Water Temperature Improvements.

Petition, Page 7, Time for Plan Development: PG&E states its position that one year after License issuance is not adequate time to develop a DeSabra Forebay Water Temperature Improvement Plan.

NMFS: We believe and support the positions of the SWRCB, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), and the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) that one year after License issuance is adequate time for PG&E to develop such a plan. PG&E has known about the need and projected requirement to plan and install the DeSabra Forebay’s “water temperature reduction device” (i.e. a pipe) since 2009 (as noted in FERC’s EA) and again in 2013 (Draft WQC).

Petition, Page 8, Reduction of Thermal Loading Criteria: The Final WQC specifies that the installed water temperature reduction device (pipe) provide an 80 percent or greater reduction in thermal loading based on comparisons of pre-pipe and post-pipe water temperatures. PG&E feels that this criteria is not needed and may not be measurable.

NMFS: Reducing thermal loading in the DeSabra Forebay is the most important action that can be taken to improve habitat conditions for CV spring-run Chinook salmon and CCV steelhead in Butte Creek. We support the positions of the SWRCB and the CDFW that the forebay fix should be designed to reduce thermal loading by 80 percent or greater. PG&E states that the average thermal loading in the DeSabra Forebay is 1.1°C and that an “effectiveness criteria” of 80 percent would mean a difference of 0.2°C between the inflow and outflow of the forebay. The wording of Condition 9 states, “*The Temperature Improvement Plan shall describe how the DeSabra Water Temperature Reduction Device will reduce the thermal loading within the DeSabra Forebay an average of 80 percent or greater.*” First, most temperature probes can easily measure temperatures within an accuracy of 0.2°C. Second, the 80 percent reduction would be measured against pre-project conditions (average of 1.1°C), so the temperature loggers only have to verify that the post-project warming in the forebay is 80 percent less than 1.1°C – i.e. be able to measure a pre- and post-project difference of 0.9°C. Standard temperature monitoring equipment is capable of collecting temperature information accurate enough that pre-pipe daily, weekly, and monthly averages can be compared to post-pipe average data and determine if a reduction in warming of 0.9°C has occurred.

The “80 percent or greater” criteria is important because it ensures that PG&E plans and installs a device that is of sufficient design and quality to protect Federally threatened species. Achieving the criteria ensures that the quality of the water delivered to critical habitats for listed salmonids in Butte Creek is not significantly affected by excessive heating as occurs now in the forebay.

Petition, Part H, Pages 10-11:

WQC Condition 27 [page 11], Configuration of the Operations Group.

In the WQC Condition 27, the SWRCB defines the “Operations Group” as including the following: The “Resource Agencies” (SWRCB, NMFS, CDFW, U.S. Forest Service, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service); PG&E; and several NGOs. PG&E believes that the Operations Group should consist of just the Resource Agencies and not include the NGOs.

NMFS: We agree with PG&E and that the Operations Group be limited to PG&E and Resource Agencies. We believe that the remaining annual public meetings (proposed in FERC’s EA and in the WQC) would provide an adequate venue for the NGOs to participate. In addition, the

Operations Group currently operates very efficiently. The Operations Group holds regular meetings (as needed or weekly) so as to implement the current annual Operations and Management Plan (OMP). The OMP uses real-time fish and water quality monitoring to adjust instream and canal flows so as to maintain the best quality of habitat in lower Butte Creek to support anadromous salmonid resources there. The Operations Group is proposed to continue in its current form and we see no reason to change this approach.

Petition, Part J, Pages 12-13:

WQC Condition 41: Climate Change.

PG&E objects to this climate change condition.

NMFS: NMFS supports the SWRCB's inclusion of this condition. It is highly desirable to have flexibility to modify conditions based on future climate change. The baseline assumptions used to develop license conditions cannot be assumed to continue in a static manner in the future. For instance, long term changes in precipitation could necessitate changes in water year classification to more accurately reflect wet and dry year frequency. Furthermore, warmer air temperatures may necessitate rethinking of temperature targets that were developed based on modeling using past climate scenarios which no longer accurately represent the climate. In each of these scenarios, it would be in PG&E's best interests to reexamine the data and the WQC in a collaborative manner. We believe it is in the best interest of the resource and PG&E to maintain flexibility if climate conditions diverge drastically from the current assumptions.

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Pacific Gas and Electric Company)
DeSabra-Centerville Hydroelectric Project)

Project No. 803

Butte Creek & West Branch Feather River)

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served, by first class mail or electronic mail, a letter to the SWRCB and to Secretary Bose of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, from the U.S. Department of Commerce's NOAA Fisheries Service, containing our comments on PG&E's Petition for Reconsideration of the SWRCB's Water Quality Certification and this Certificate of Service upon each person designated on the official service list compiled by the Commission in the above-captioned proceeding.

Dated this 10th day of November 2015



William E. Foster
National Marine Fisheries Service