
State Water Resources Control Board

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR
DRAFT WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION
AND
NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF
REVISED DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT**

**PACIFIC GAS AND ELECTRIC COMPANY'S
UPPER NORTH FORK FEATHER RIVER HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION PROJECT NO. 2105**

To: Interested Parties Mailing List

Notice is hereby given that the draft water quality certification (certification) and the *Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Upper North Fork Feather River Hydroelectric Project* (RDEIR) are available for public review and comment.

Background

Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) filed an application for relicensing of the Upper North Fork Feather River Hydroelectric Project (UNFFR Project) with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). As part of the relicensing process PG&E filed a certification application under section 401 of the Clean Water Act, with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board).

Prior to issuance of a certification, the State Water Board must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA; Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.). The State Water Board, as lead agency for CEQA compliance, has directed the preparation of an environmental impact report (EIR) for the UNFFR Project, in compliance with State CEQA guidelines. A Draft EIR was issued in November 2014. In response to comments on the 2014 Draft EIR, Alternatives 1 and 2 were revised and a new alternative (Alternative 3) was added, a description of which can be found in Chapter 3 of the RDEIR. Additionally, revisions were made to improve the organization and clarity of the document. Comments on the 2014 Draft EIR, although part of the administrative record, will not have written responses. **If interested parties have comments on the RDEIR, new comments must be submitted.**

The State Water Board is not required to issue a draft certification for public review and comment, but has elected to do so as a courtesy to interested parties during the public review period for the RDEIR. Please note that the deadline for comments on the certification is earlier than the deadline for comments on the RDEIR, as specified below.

E. JOAQUIN ESQUIVEL, CHAIR | EILEEN SOBECK, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The UNFFR Project

The UNFFR Project is located in the upper reaches of the North Fork Feather River watershed, upstream of Lake Oroville, in Plumas County, California. The UNFFR Project was originally licensed by FERC in 1955 (FERC Project No. 2105). The UNFFR Project includes: three reservoirs with dams (Lake Almanor, Butt Valley Reservoir, and Belden Forebay); five powerhouses; tunnels and penstocks connecting the reservoirs to the powerhouses; transmission facilities; access facilities; and associated operation and maintenance. The five powerhouses include eight hydroelectric generating units with a total nameplate capacity of 362.3 megawatts.

In addition to power generation, the UNFFR Project provides a range of recreation facilities, including campgrounds, marinas, and day-use areas. Lake Almanor and Butt Valley Reservoir provide a variety of recreation opportunities, including contact and non-contact water-based recreation.

Overview of RDEIR and Proposed UNFFR Project

The RDEIR evaluates the Proposed UNFFR Project (Proposed Project) as well as three alternatives. For purposes of the CEQA analysis, the Proposed Project consists of operation of the UNFFR Project under a new FERC license in accordance with PG&E's application to FERC, the partial settlement agreement¹ between PG&E and numerous stakeholders, conditions proposed by the United States Forest Service pursuant to section 4(e) of the Federal Power Act, and FERC's Staff Alternative as outlined in Chapter 3 of the RDEIR.

The RDEIR identifies significant impacts for the following resources: Aesthetics; Air Quality; Cultural Resources; Fisheries; Geology, Geomorphology, and Soils; Hazards and Hazardous Materials; Noise; Transportation and Traffic; Vegetation, Wildlife, and Sensitive Biological Resources; and Water Quality. With the exception of Aesthetics and Recreation, each of the above-referenced significant impacts can be reduced to a less than significant level with implementation of mitigation measures. Aesthetics and Recreation resource impacts are identified as significant and unavoidable.

In 2006, the State Water Board listed the North Fork Feather River, upstream of Lake Oroville, on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list of impaired water bodies. The United States Environmental Protection Agency approved the 2006 Section 303(d) list on June 28, 2007. The North Fork Feather River is impaired for temperature, meaning technology-based effluent limitations on point sources of pollution are inadequate to meet the *Water Quality Control Plan for the Sacramento River and San Joaquin River Basins*' applicable water quality objectives for temperature. The State Water Board cited hydromodification and flow regulation/modification as potential sources of the impairment.

¹ Project 2105 Relicensing Settlement Agreement.

Draft Water Quality Certification

In accordance with the Clean Water Act, the draft certification is developed to ensure the UNFFR Project will protect water quality and beneficial uses throughout the term of the new FERC license and any amendments thereto. The draft certification is consistent with Alternative 3 of the RDEIR and is comprised of the following:

- Implementation of the Proposed Project with the minimum flows outlined in the Project 2105 Relicensing Settlement Agreement;
- Increased releases of up to 250 cubic feet per second from the Canyon Dam outlet for purposes of temperature control from June 16 to September 15;
- Monitoring of the North Fork Feather River and Lake Almanor to evaluate water quality and fisheries effects resulting from implementation of the Proposed Project with increased Canyon dam flows; and
- Management framework conditions, whereby the State Water Board can require additional or modified certification conditions for UNFFR Project operations based on monitoring results, if appropriate.

In developing a draft certification, State Water Board staff considered the RDEIR and all supporting information. This includes but is not limited to: FERC's Final *Environmental Impact Statement for the Upper North Fork Feather River Project*; PG&E's application for certification; studies; reports; meeting notes; and stakeholder comments.

Throughout the FERC relicensing process, State Water Board staff heard concerns from stakeholders related to potential impacts associated with use of thermal curtains. While the draft certification would allow for the installation of thermal curtains, if needed, during the term of the new FERC license, the draft certification would not require installation of thermal curtains at this time. Rather, the draft certification would require supplemental flow releases along with monitoring and adaptive management to evaluate the effectiveness of the certification conditions and ensure protection of beneficial uses in the North Fork Feather River and Lake Almanor.

How to Comment

The comment period for the draft certification is from the date of this notice until 5:00 pm on June 15, 2020.

The comment period for the RDEIR is from the date of this notice until 5:00 pm on July 7, 2020.

Comments must specifically identify the document to which the comment(s) apply (i.e., RDEIR or draft certification) and can be submitted electronically or by mail to:

Email: WR401Program@waterboards.ca.gov

or

By Mail:

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

Notice of Draft Water Quality Certification and Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report for Upper North Fork Feather River Project

The RDEIR and draft certification are available on the [UNFFR Project's webpage](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/water_quality_cert/unffr_ferc2105.html) at: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/water_quality_cert/unffr_ferc2105.html

If you cannot access the documents online, you can review hard copies of the RDEIR and draft certification at the locations below. **These documents will be available at the following locations no later than May 26, 2020.** Please note the days the locations are open are provided for convenience; locations may be closed on the indicated days for holidays or other reasons. **We encourage you to call and make an appointment to ensure the office is open and appropriate social distancing can be accommodated during the COVID-19 pandemic.**

State Water Board
CalEPA Headquarters Building
1001 I Street, 2nd Floor
Room 2-114
Sacramento, CA 95814
(916) 314-5300
(Wednesdays and Fridays)
8:00 am – 4:00 pm

Central Valley Regional Water Quality
Control Board, Redding Office
364 Knollcrest Drive,
Suite 2015
Redding, CA 96002
(530) 224-4845
(Monday – Friday)
8:00 am – 5:00 pm

KEEP INFORMED OF PROJECT MILESTONES

To receive emails related to the UNFFR Project and other projects pursuing certifications managed by the Division of Water Rights, interested persons should enroll in the “Water Rights Water Quality Certification” e-mail notification service. Instructions on how to sign up for the State Water Board’s Email Subscription List are outlined below:

1. Visit:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.shtml#rights

2. Provide your name and email in the required fields.

3. In the categories below the email and name fields, select “Water Rights,” then “Water Rights Water Quality Certification.”

4. Click the "Subscribe" button.

5. An email will be sent to you. You must respond to the email message to confirm your membership on the selected list(s).

By enrolling in this email list, you will receive notices for current projects in the Division of Water Rights’ Water Quality Certification Program, including the UNFFR Project. You can enroll or withdraw from the email subscription service at any time.

If you do not have internet access or do not wish to participate in the Email Subscription List, you may contact Mr. Jordan Smith at (916) 323-3645 and request to receive notices by mail.

Notice of Draft Water Quality Certification and Revised Draft Environmental Impact Report for Upper North Fork Feather River Project

If you have questions regarding this Notice, please contact Mr. Jordan Smith by phone at (916) 323-3645 or by email at WR401Program@waterboards.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Ann Marie Ore, Program Manager
Water Quality Certification & Public Trust Section
Division of Water Rights

Date