

SUMMARY FOR ELECTRONIC DOCUMENT SUBMITTAL

SCH # 99092073

LEAD AGENCY: Marin Emergency Radio Authority (MERA)

PROJECT TITLE: MERA Next Generation Radio Communication System

PROJECT LOCATION: Marin and Sonoma Counties

Project Description

The Marin Emergency Radio Authority's (MERA) proposed project is the Next Generation Radio Communication System, an upgrade to Marin County's existing emergency radio communications system that will improve the County's emergency communication capabilities during daily public service and critical emergencies. The proposed project would replace equipment at currently operating communications sites as well as install telecommunications facilities (towers, microwave dishes, antennae, radio shelter and emergency power generation) at new sites where public and private infrastructure already exists. In total, 10 existing sites would be upgraded, eight new sites would be introduced, and five existing sites would be decommissioned.

The existing MERA system currently includes 16 active communication sites. The existing sites to be retained are: Marin Civic Center, Big Rock Ridge, Mt. Tamalpais, Mt. Barnabe, Point Reyes Hill, Dollar Hill, San Pedro Ridge, Mt. Tiburon, Sonoma Mountain and Stewart Point. The five sites to be decommissioned are Forbes Hill in San Rafael, Mt. Burdell in Novato, Mill Valley City Hall, Mill Valley Public Safety Building and Bay Hill Road in Sonoma County. The eight new sites to be added are the Emergency Operations Facility (Prime Site), Tomales (Parks Ranch), Coyote Peak (Walker Creek Ranch) Skyview Terrace (San Rafael), Muir Beach Water Tank, Wolfback Ridge, Mt. Burdell OTA, and Mill Valley Water Tank. The Next Gen System will have a total of 18 communication sites, two more sites than the existing system. Seventeen of the sites are located in Marin County and one site is in Sonoma County (See Figure 1 in NOC).

Significant or Potentially Significant Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The proposed Next Gen Project would result in significant unavoidable visual/aesthetic impacts at five of the new communication sites: Skyview Terrace, Tomales, Coyote Peak, Muir Beach Water Tank and Mill Valley Water Tank. Visual impact mitigation measures such as fencing, landscape screening and painting would soften the visual impact, but would not reduce the impacts to less-than-significant.

The cultural resource analysis and tribal consultation found that the limited foundation excavations required for new towers and radio buildings could have an impact on currently unknown cultural and tribal resources at all sites. Proposed mitigation measures would require work to be halted if cultural artifacts or human remains were encountered. Any substantial change in design of project would require further consultation with tribal representatives, and a

tribal monitor with stop work authority will be present during excavation. **Implementation of mitigation measures would reduce impacts to less-than-significant.**

The biological resource analysis found that the proposed project could have a potential significant impact on special status plant species at two sites Stewart Point (Marin Manzanita) and Mill Valley Water Tank (Oakland star-tulip), and potential impact on American badger, red-legged frog and burrowing owl at the Tomales site, and potential impact on nesting birds at Point Reyes Hill, Dollar Hill, Mt. Tiburon, Tomales, Muir Beach, and Mill Valley water tank sites. All potential impacts to special status plant and animal species and nesting birds can be mitigated by pre-construction surveys designed to identify the presence of special status species and erection of temporary fencing including limitations on construction during the wildlife nesting season. **Implementation of recommended mitigation would reduce all potential impacts to special status species to less-than-significant.**

Potential construction impacts on air and water quality, and noise will be avoided by implementation of Best Management Practices and adopted community noise standards.

The proposed project was found to comply with all adopted standards for general public radio frequency exposure through elevated placement of antennas on towers and fencing of communications sites. Potential radio frequency exposure impacts to maintenance workers **will be mitigated to less-than-significant** by the posting of warning signs at the Prime Site (EOC), Civic Center and Mt. Tiburon sites.

Potential seismic impacts will be avoided by requiring design level-geotechnical reports prior to new construction and compliance with California's adopted seismic building and construction standards.

Potential Areas of Controversy

Environmental concerns raised during consultation with Responsible and Trustee agencies and the general public included:

- Aesthetic changes associated with modifications to existing towers
- Aesthetic changes associated with the construction of new towers
- Impacts to biological resources while improving the existing road to Coyote Peak
- Alterations to the significance of historic resources at three sites
- Possible alterations to tribal cultural resources at 13 sites
- Radio frequency emissions within controlled spaces with worker access
- Radio frequency emissions in uncontrolled spaces with public access
- Consistency with coastal development standards

Responsible and Trustee Agencies

California Coastal Commission, California Department of Transportation, California Fish and Wildlife, Regional Water Quality Control District, Bay Area Air Quality Management District, California Native American Heritage Commission, and the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria.