



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
 DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
 Northern Region
 601 Locust Street
 Redding, CA 96001
www.wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



Governor's Office of Planning & Research

October 12, 2021

Oct 13 2021

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Cortney Flather, Natural Resources Technician
 County of Lassen
 Department of Planning and Building Services
 707 Nevada Street, Suite 5
 Susanville, CA 96130
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SUBJECT: REVIEW OF PREAPPLICATION CONSULTATION FOR PRELIMINARY REVIEW PR-2021-001 LASSEN MUNICIPAL UTILITY DISTRICT, STATE CLEARINGHOUSE NUMBER 2021090243, ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBER 015-120-013, NEAR ADIN, LASSEN COUNTY

Dear Cortney Flather:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has reviewed the Preapplication Consultation for the Preliminary Review of Lassen Municipal Utility District's (LMUD) Hayden Hill Mine transmission line dated September 13, 2021, for the above-referenced project (Project). As a trustee for the State's fish and wildlife resources, the Department has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and their habitat. As a responsible agency, the Department administers the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) and other provisions of the Fish and Game Code (FGC) that conserve the State's fish and wildlife public trust resources. The Department offers the following comments and recommendations on this Project in our role as a trustee and responsible agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), California Public Resources Code §21000 et seq. The following are informal comments intended to assist the Lead Agency in making informed decisions early in the Project development and review process.

Project Description

The Project as described is a "Preliminary review of a project proposal seeking to leave a 69-kV power transmission line approximately 20 feet wide and 81,000 feet in length (approximately 17,000 feet of this line is on USFS Property) in place and turn the line over (transfer ownership) to Surprise Valley Electrification Corporation for energization."

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The adopted Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the approval of the Use Permit and Reclamation Plan for Lassen Gold Mining Inc. mining operation, stated the power line would be removed at the conclusion of mining activity. Mining activity ceased in 1997. LMUD purchased the line December 2007. The line has not been energized “for several years.”

Comments and Recommendations

The Department has the following comments and recommendations as they pertain to biological resources:

Biological Surveys

Because the proposed Project has not had any type of biological surveys conducted in over 20 years, the Department recommends surveys be conducted prior to site modification to avoid impacts to natural resources that may occur on the site. For this Project, the intent is to reenergize the transmission line; however, if there is the possibility the transmission line infrastructure will be removed as required in the previous EIR, assessing the impacts to either situation should be addressed in the biological assessment.

A basic biological assessment would include botanical, wildlife, and habitat surveys to determine whether focused or protocol-level surveys are warranted. These surveys would be conducted at the appropriate time of the year and by biologists that demonstrate experience in the local flora and fauna of Lassen County, including experience with greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*). The Department recommends all plant and wildlife species identified in the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) and other biological resource databases (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California Native Plant Society, or other pertinent references) be analyzed for the potential to occur within the Project area.

The CNDDDB is a positive sighting database. It does not predict where something may be found. The Department maps occurrences only where we have documentation that the species was found at the site. There are many areas of the state where no surveys have been conducted and therefore there is nothing on the map. That does not mean that there are no special status species present. The next step is to conduct surveys to document what is present today and submit the information on special status species to the Department and CNDDDB. All surveys should be conducted prior to approval of the Project and survey results shall be e-mailed to the Department at the R1CEQARedding@wildlife.ca.gov.

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The following should be included in the biological assessment:

1. Date/time/weather conditions during the survey(s).
2. A description of the natural environment.
3. A list of common and special status plant and wildlife species as well as habitats present onsite at the time of the survey(s).
4. Rare/local/unusual species and habitats present during the survey(s).
5. A thorough assessment of rare plants and sensitive natural communities should be conducted following the Department's March 2018 *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities* (<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=18959&inline>).
6. If habitat is present for special status plants or wildlife, focused species-specific surveys should be conducted at the appropriate time of year and/or time of day when the species are active or otherwise identifiable. Acceptable species-specific survey procedures should be developed in consultation with the Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Links to some survey procedures are provided on the Department's website (<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation>). All surveys should be conducted prior to approval of the Project and survey results provided in the subsequent environmental document.
7. If any special-status species are found during surveys, the Department requests that CNDDDB forms be filled out online and submitted. Instructions for providing data to the CNDDDB can be found at: <https://wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>.
8. Impacts to and maintenance of wildlife corridor/movement areas and other key seasonal use areas should be fully evaluated and provided.
9. A discussion of impacts associated with increased lighting, noise, human activity, impacts of free-roaming domestic animals including dogs and cats, changes in drainage patterns, changes in water volume, velocity, quantity, and quality, soil erosion, and/or sedimentation in streams and watercourses on or near the Project site.
10. A discussion on fuels management, and how it would affect biological resources, should be discussed and analyzed, if applicable.
11. Mitigation measures for adverse Project-related impacts to sensitive plants, wildlife, and habitats should be developed and thoroughly discussed. Mitigation measures should first emphasize avoidance and reduction of Project impacts. For unavoidable impacts, the feasibility of on-site habitat restoration or enhancement should be discussed. If on-site mitigation is not feasible, off-site mitigation through habitat creation, enhancement, acquisition, and preservation in perpetuity should be addressed.

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12. If the Project site has the potential to support aquatic, riparian, or wetland habitat, a delineation of lakes, streams, and associated riparian habitats potentially affected by the Project should be provided for agency and public review. This report should include a preliminary jurisdictional delineation including wetlands identification pursuant to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wetland definition as adopted by the Department. Please note that some wetland and riparian habitats subject to the Department's authority may extend beyond the jurisdictional limits of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The jurisdictional delineation should also include mapping of ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial stream courses potentially impacted by the Project. In addition to "federally protected wetlands" (see CEQA Appendix G (IV)(c)), the Department considers impacts to any wetlands (as defined by the Department) as potentially significant.

Botanical Surveys

Botanical surveys should be conducted across the entire Project site during the appropriate blooming time prior to the approval of this Project. Botanical surveys should follow the Department's March 20, 2018, *Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities*, available here:

<https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=18959>.

If no special status plant species are found during the botanical survey no other measures will be required. However, if drought conditions exist, additional pre-construction surveys for special status plant species may be warranted. If special status plant species are found during the botanical surveys, the plants should be marked by a qualified biologist familiar with the species. If the area can be avoided, exclusionary fencing will be placed around the plants and no pedestrian or vehicular entry shall be allowed. Botanical survey results shall be emailed to the Department at R1CEQARedding@wildlife.ca.gov.

California Endangered Species Act

Please be advised that a CESA permit must be obtained if the project has the potential to result in "take" of plants or animals listed under CESA, either during construction or over the life of the project. Issuance of a CESA Permit is subject to CEQA documentation; the CEQA document must specify impacts, mitigation measures, and a mitigation monitoring and reporting program. If the Project will impact CESA listed species, early consultation is encouraged, as significant modification to the Project and mitigation measures may be required to obtain a CESA Permit. Information on how to attain a CESA permit is available here:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/CESA/Permitting>.

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Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement

For any activity that will divert or obstruct the natural flow, or change the bed, channel, or bank (which includes associated riparian resources) of a river or stream, or use material from a streambed, the Department will require a Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Notification, pursuant to section 1600 et seq. of the Fish and Game Code, from the applicant. Project activities, which would be subject to LSA Notification requirements, include construction of stormwater features that discharge on or over the streambank and modification of associated riparian resources growing on the bank. Issuance of an LSA Agreement is subject to CEQA. The Department, as a responsible agency under CEQA, will consider the CEQA document for the Project. The CEQA document should fully identify the potential impacts to the stream or riparian resources and provide adequate avoidance, mitigation, monitoring, and reporting commitments for completion of the agreement. To obtain information about the LSA notification process, please access our website at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/LSA>.

Nesting Birds

If the Project has the potential to directly impact nesting bird habitat or indirectly disturb nesting birds through audio or visual disturbance, the Department recommends the following measures be implemented to protect nesting birds and raptors protected under FGC sections 3503 and 3503.5:

- a) Conduct vegetation removal and other ground-disturbance activities associated with construction from September 1 through January 31, when birds are not nesting; or
- b) Conduct pre-construction surveys for nesting birds if vegetation removal or ground disturbing activities are to take place during the nesting season (February 1 through August 31). These surveys shall be conducted by a qualified biologist no more than one week prior to vegetation removal or construction activities during the nesting season. If an active nest is located during the preconstruction surveys, a non-disturbance buffer shall be established around the nest by a qualified biologist in consultation with the Department. No vegetation removal or construction activities shall occur within this non-disturbance buffer until the young have fledged, as determined through additional monitoring by the qualified biologist. The results of the pre-construction surveys shall be sent electronically to the Department at R1CEQARedding@wildlife.ca.gov.

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If you have any questions, please contact Amy Henderson, Senior Environmental Scientist, at (530) 598-7194, or by email at Amy.Henderson@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:
Curt Babcock
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Curt Babcock

Habitat Conservation Program Manager

ec: State Clearinghouse
State.Clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov

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