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## State Water Resources Control Board

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### *Video and Teleconference Meeting During COVID-19 Emergency*

As a result of the COVID-19 emergency and as authorized by Government Code section 11133 and Executive Order [N-1-22](#), this meeting will occur solely via remote presence

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## **CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACTING SCOPING MEETING AND NOTICE OF PREPARATION**

### **STATEWIDE WASTE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS AND CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 401 WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION FOR ELECTRIC UTILITY OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIVITIES**

**Friday, February 18, 2022  
10:00 a.m.**

**[Remote Viewing Link  
\(https://video.calepa.ca.gov/#/\)](https://video.calepa.ca.gov/#/)**

### **Remote Participation Only**

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) staff will hold a California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) scoping meeting to receive public input on the content and scope of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that will be prepared to assess the potential environmental effects of a proposed project, Statewide Waste Discharge Requirements and Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification for Electric Utility Operations and Maintenance Activities Related to Wildfire Mitigation and Other Similar Activities (General Order).

The scoping meeting will include a brief presentation about the proposed General Order followed by the opportunity for public comment. A quorum of State Water Board members may be present; however, no action will be taken.

The State Water Board will accept both written and oral comments regarding scoping elements. Written comments may be submitted in accordance with the instructions set forth below by **12:00 p.m. (noon) on March 4, 2022.**

Information about the scoping meeting is located on the [Statewide Utility Wildfire Mitigation General Order | California State Water Resources Control Board](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/statewide-utility-wildfire-mitigation-general-order.html) webpage at: [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water\\_issues/programs/cwa401/statewide-utility-wildfire-mitigation-general-order.html](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/cwa401/statewide-utility-wildfire-mitigation-general-order.html).

### **MEETING LOGISTICS**

To comment or ask questions during the online meeting, register using the [Remote Meeting Registration Link](https://forms.office.com/g/GSSyd6ciKd) (<https://forms.office.com/g/GSSyd6ciKd>). Following registration, virtual participation information will be sent to you one day prior to the meeting. The live webcast, which does not give viewers the ability to comment or ask questions, will be available at: <https://video.calepa.ca.gov/#/>. Registration is not required to view the live webcast.

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

The meeting will be offered in English. To request other language interpretation or other accommodation, please submit your request at least 7 business days before the meeting (by February 9, 2022) by contacting Elizabeth Reece at [Elizabeth.Reece@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Reece@waterboards.ca.gov). Telecommunications device for the hearing impaired (TDD) users may contact the California Relay Service at (800) 735-2922.

## **Notice of Preparation**

**TO:** State Clearinghouse  
P.O. Box 3044  
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

**FROM LEAD AGENCY:** State Water Resources Control Board  
P.O. Box 100  
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100  
Attention Jean Bandura

**SUBJECT: STATEWIDE WASTE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS AND CLEAN WATER ACT SECTION 401 WATER QUALITY CERTIFICATION FOR ELECTRIC UTILITY OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES RELATED TO WILDFIRE MITIGATION AND OTHER SIMILAR ACTIVITIES**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The State Water Board proposes to develop a General Order to permit discharges of waste associated with operations and maintenance activities related to wildfire management by electric utility companies (e.g., vegetation management; system hardening, and site access) into waters of the state. This General Order proposes to also cover electric utility infrastructure operations and maintenance activities that are not directly related to wildfire mitigation but have the same potential effects on water quality as wildfire mitigation activities. Pursuant to CEQA, the State Water Board will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an EIR for the proposed General Order.

## BACKGROUND

The California Legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 901 on August 31, 2018, which imposed additional requirements on wildfire mitigation plans developed by utilities aimed at reducing infrastructure related wildfire risk, including plans for vegetation management. The goal of this General Order is to develop a streamlined permitting process that protects aquatic resources (e.g., wetlands, lakes, and stream channels) while utilities carry out the activities mandated by SB 901. In addition, this General Order proposes to cover such operations and maintenance activities even when they are not directly related to wildfire mitigation because those activities have the same potential effects on water quality and are also needed to ensure grid reliability.

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A variety of electric utility operations and maintenance activity types that take place throughout the State are proposed for inclusion in the General Order. The following proposed activity types, when discharges may affect the quality of waters of the state, are included:

1. **Vegetation management** – trimming, mowing, removal, pesticide application, or other prevention methods used to manipulate vegetation underneath or adjacent to existing circuits, electrical structures and facilities.
2. **Post-fire response** – hazardous tree removal, repair and replacement of burned facilities.
3. **Site access development/maintenance** – creation, maintenance, improvements (e.g., grading, blading, graveling, brushing) of roads used to access electric utility facilities; includes maintenance and replacement of drainage crossings, culverts, ditches and side drains. This also includes placement of mats or other materials such as sandbags or sheet piles to gain access and perform work.
4. **Fire Retardant or Suppressant Application** – application of chemical compounds such as surfactants to prevent and slow the spread of wildfires.
5. **Staging Areas and Laydown Yards** – areas needed to support operations and maintenance activities; areas contain project-related equipment, vehicles and materials, as well as parking for crews, potable water, project trailers, shelter, etc.
6. **Pole/Tower Repairs or Replacement** – repair, replacement, or upgrade of aging and deteriorated poles and/or towers.
7. **Substation Maintenance** – repair or replace transformer, switches, fuses, cutouts, meters, and insulators.
8. **Transmission Tower Maintenance** – repair or replace tower foundations and/or the upper portion of the tower.
9. **Structural Conversion** – structural conversions; for example, conversion of a single pole to an H-Frame structure, tubular steel pole or lattice steel tower.

10. **Line Reconductoring** – reconductoring of overhead electric utility lines to replace existing conductors with new conductors, along existing circuits; includes splicing and tensioning of electric lines.
11. **Undergrounding Powerlines** – replacement of overhead powerlines with underground powerlines; includes horizontal boring or trenching underground.
12. **Boardwalk Repairs or Replacement** – repair or replacement of access boardwalks used to service transmission facilities.
13. **Electric Utility Infrastructure Lowering, Maintenance, Replacement or Removal** – electric utility infrastructure sections are lowered, maintained, replaced, or removed due to age, size, design, condition, and exposure.

Operations and maintenance activities must incorporate applicable specified protection measures, such as design guidelines or avoidance and minimization techniques, or other criteria into their project descriptions to meet the expected eligibility criteria in the proposed General Order.

## PROJECT LOCATION

The proposed General Order addresses future activities that may occur statewide upon notification and permitting authority review. The proposed General Order would be administered, in part, within the jurisdiction of each Regional Board.

## ENVIRONMENTAL BASELINE

California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15125 states that an EIR must include a description of the existing physical environmental conditions in the vicinity of the project, as they exist at the time the Notice of Preparation is published from local, regional, and, in this case, state perspectives. The environmental setting will constitute the baseline physical conditions that State Water Board, the Lead Agency, will use to determine whether an impact is significant. In general, the environmental baseline is the same as existing conditions.

## PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

A reasonable range of potentially feasible project alternatives, in addition to the no project alternative, will be addressed, following the scoping process and will consider the views of responsible and trustee agencies and the public.

## POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The EIR will focus on resources that the State Water Board expects the project to have probable environmental effects on, which are:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Geology and Soils

- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Noise
- Tribal Cultural Resources, and
- Wildfire

## **SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN COMMENTS**

Written comment submittals must include the following in the subject line: **“Comment Letter – Proposed Electric Utility General Order.”** Written comments must be received no later than **12:00 noon on March 4, 2022** and addressed to:

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board  
State Water Resources Control Board  
P.O. Box 100, Sacramento, CA 95812-2000 (mail)  
1001 I Street, 15th floor, Sacramento, CA 95814 (hand-delivered)

Comment letters may be submitted electronically, in pdf text format (if less than 15 megabytes in total size), to the Clerk to the Board via e-mail at [commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov). If the file is greater than 15 megabytes in total size, then the comment letter may be submitted by fax at (916) 341-5620, mailed to the address above, or by hand delivery. Couriers delivering hand copies of comment letters must check in with lobby security personnel, who can contact Jeanine Townsend at (916) 341-5600.

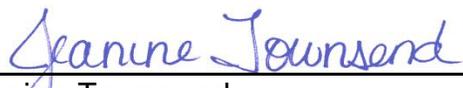
## **FUTURE NOTICES**

Any change in the date, time, and place of the scoping meeting will be publicly noticed on the State Water Board website and through Lyris e-mail list. Any person desiring to receive future notices concerning the proposed General Order should sign up on the Lyris e-mail list. To sign up for a Lyris list, access the [email List Subscription Form](#) at the webaddress listed below, click the “Water Quality” tab, and check the box for “CWA401 – Certification and Wetlands Program”:

[http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email\\_subscriptions/swrcb\\_subscribe.shtml](http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/resources/email_subscriptions/swrcb_subscribe.shtml).

Please direct questions about this notice to Jean Bandura at (916) 322-7781 or [Jean.Bandura@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:Jean.Bandura@waterboards.ca.gov).

February 2, 2022  
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Date

  
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Jeanine Townsend  
Clerk to the Board