

FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION
Washington, D. C. 20426

OFFICE OF ENERGY PROJECTS

Project No. 77-332–California
Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project
Pacific Gas and Electric Company

May 22, 2026

VIA FERC Service

Subject: Scoping Document 1 for the proposed Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project
surrender and decommissioning

The Commission is reviewing Pacific Gas and Electric Company's (PG&E) application for surrender and decommissioning of the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project No. 77, as well as the proposed non-project use of project lands to construct a New Eel-Russian Facility (NERF) for the purpose of water diversion through some of the project's existing infrastructure for non-project uses. The project is located on the Eel River and East Fork of the Russian River in Lake and Mendocino counties, California. The project occupies federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Mendocino National Forest.

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, Commission staff will prepare either an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement (collectively referred to as the "NEPA document"), which will be used by the Commission to determine whether, and under what conditions, to authorize surrender and decommissioning of the project, as well as the proposed non-project use of project lands. To support and assist our environmental review, Commission staff are beginning the public scoping process to ensure pertinent issues are identified and analyzed, and that our NEPA document is thorough and balanced. The Commission's scoping process will satisfy the NEPA scoping requirements.

Commission staff invite your participation in the scoping process and are circulating the attached Scoping Document 1 (SD1) to provide you with information on the project. We are also soliciting your comments and suggestions on our preliminary list of issues and alternatives to be addressed in the NEPA document.

We will hold two in-person scoping meetings to receive comments on the scope of the NEPA document:

Evening Scoping Meeting

DATE: Tuesday, June 23, 2026

TIME: 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Pacific Time (PT)

PLACE: Ukiah Valley Conference Center, Chenin Blanc Room

ADDRESS: 200 South School Street, Ukiah, CA 95482

Daytime Scoping Meeting

DATE: Wednesday, June 24, 2026

TIME: 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m (PT)

PLACE: Ukiah Valley Conference Center, Chenin Blanc Room

ADDRESS: 200 South School Street, Ukiah, CA 95482

We invite all interested agencies, Native American Tribes, non-governmental organizations, and individuals to attend. Further information on the scoping meetings is available in the enclosed SD1.

The SD1 notice is being distributed to the Commission's official mailing list (see section 7.0 Mailing List) and to PG&E's distribution list. If you wish to be added to or removed from the Commission's official mailing list, please send your request by email to FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov or via mail. Submissions sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426. Submissions sent via any other carrier must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 12225 Wilkins Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20852. All written or emailed requests must specify your wish to be added to, or removed from, the mailing list and must clearly identify the following on the first page: **Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project No. P-77-332.**

Please review SD1 and, if you wish to provide comments for the purposes of scoping, follow the instructions in section 5.0, Request for Information. If you have any questions about SD1, the scoping process, or how Commission staff will develop the NEPA document for this project, please contact Diana Shannon at (202) 502-6136 or via email at diana.shannon@ferc.gov. Additional information about the Commission and the project may be obtained from the Commission's website, at <http://www.ferc.gov>. The deadline for filing scoping comments is **on or before 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time on July 24, 2026**. The Commission encourages electronic filings.

Enclosure: Scoping Document 1

SCOPING DOCUMENT 1

POTTER VALLEY HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT NO. 77-332

CALIFORNIA



Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Office of Energy Projects
Division of Hydropower Administration and Compliance
Washington, DC

May 2026

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SCOPING DOCUMENT 1

Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project No. 77-332

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission or FERC), under the authority of the Federal Power Act (FPA),¹ licenses and oversees the operation of non-federal hydroelectric projects in the United States. Section 6 of the FPA allows licensees to surrender existing licenses and cease operation of their project upon mutual agreement between the licensee and the Commission.

Under the Commission's regulations at 18 Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) 6.2, a license may be surrendered only when the licensee has fulfilled those obligations that are prescribed by the Commission. Where project works have been constructed on lands of the United States, the licensee is required to restore the lands to a condition satisfactory to the Department having supervision over such lands and annual charges will continue until such restoration has been satisfactorily completed.

1.1 Background

The 9.96-megawatt Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project is located on the Eel River and East Fork of the Russian River in Lake and Mendocino counties, California, approximately 15 miles northeast of the City of Ukiah, California (Figure 1). The project occupies federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, Mendocino National Forest. The Commission issued a 40-year license for the project to Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E or licensee) on October 4, 1983, which expired on April 14, 2022.²

On April 6, 2017, PG&E filed a Notice of Intent (NOI) and Pre-Application Document (PAD), and informed the Commission of its intent to relicense the project. On January 25, 2019, PG&E filed a notice of withdrawal of its NOI and PAD to relicense the project, which became effective on February 11, 2019. On March 1, 2019, Commission staff issued notice of PG&E's withdrawal of its intent to file a license application and solicited other potential applicants to file NOIs and PADS, and requests to complete the remaining pre-filing stages of the integrated licensing process (ILP).

¹ United States Code (U.S.C.) § 791(a)-825(r).

² *Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, 25 FERC ¶ 61,010 (1983). As amended by *Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, 106 FERC ¶ 61,065 (2004). The project is operating under annual license, issued on April 21, 2022. See FERC Accession No. 20220421-3034.

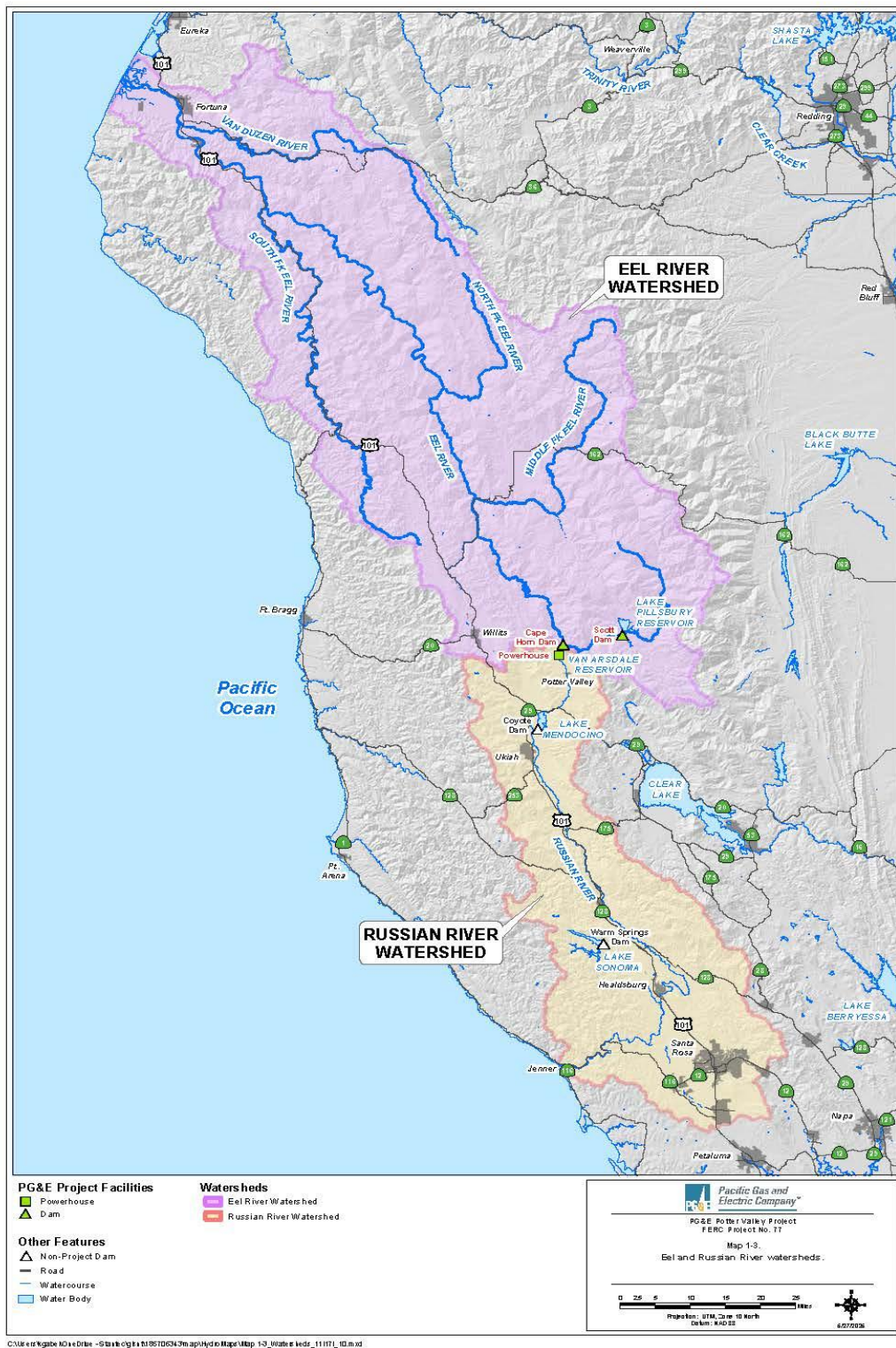


Figure 1. Project Location (Source: Pacific Gas and Electric Company Surrender Application, filed on July 25, 2025).

On June 28, 2019, Mendocino County Inland Water Agency and Power Commission; Sonoma County Water Agency; California Trout, Inc.; and the County of Humboldt, California (NOI Parties) collectively filed an NOI to file an application for new license for the project.³ On August 1, 2019, staff issued public notice of the NOI Parties' intent to continue the licensing process and file a final license application by April 14, 2022. On September 2, 2021, the NOI Parties filed a request that the Commission place in abeyance the schedule for the ILP until May 31, 2022. On September 23, 2021, Commission staff reiterated the April 14, 2022 deadline to file a license application. Ultimately, the NOI Parties did not file a license application.

However, on April 15, 2022, PVP 77 LLC (PVP) filed a license application⁴ that Commission staff rejected as untimely and patently deficient by letter issued April 22, 2022. PVP filed a request for rehearing on April 25, 2022. Those issues were addressed in the Commission's order issued July 5, 2022,⁵ which denied rehearing.

With no adequate license applications filed for the project, on May 11, 2022, Commission staff requested PG&E file a plan and schedule for the filing of a surrender application. PG&E responded on July 8, 2022, and proposed to file a surrender application within 30 months of the Commission's approval of the schedule. On July 29, 2022, the Commission approved this schedule, establishing a due date for filing the surrender application by January 2025. On June 6, 2024, PG&E requested additional time (i.e., until July 29, 2025) to file the application. On July 1, 2024, Commission staff granted this extension of time. After pre-filing consultation with federal and state resource agencies, Tribes, and other interested parties beginning in November 2023, PG&E filed its surrender application with the Commission on July 25, 2025.

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA),⁶ the Commission's regulations, and other applicable laws require that we independently evaluate the environmental effects of surrendering the project license as proposed, as well as consider a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed action. The Commission intends to

³ The NOI Parties indicated they were filing the NOI as proxies for a new Regional Entity that would eventually be the license applicant for the project.

⁴ PVP's application for license was given Project No. 15273.

⁵ *PVP 77 LLC*, 180 FERC ¶ 61,007 (2022).

⁶ 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*; *see also* 18 C.F.R. pt. 380 (2025) (Commission's regulations implementing NEPA); FERC, Staff Guidance Manual on Implementation of NEPA (June 2025), <https://www.ferc.gov/media/staff-guidance-manual-implementation-national-environmental-policy-act-june-2025s..>

develop either an environmental assessment or an environmental impact statement (collectively referred to as the “NEPA document”) that describes and evaluates the probable effects, including an assessment of the site-specific and cumulative effects, if any, of the proposed action and alternatives. The NEPA document preparation will be supported by a scoping process to ensure all pertinent issues are identified and analyzed.

1.2 Project Description

As described in the license, as amended,⁷ project works consist of: (1) Lake Pillsbury, having a normal surface area of 2,280 acres and a normal gross storage capacity of 86,785 acre-feet,⁸ impounded by; (2) Scott Dam, a concrete gravity, ogee-shaped structure, having a maximum height of 130 feet and a total length of 805 feet; (3) Van Arsdale reservoir, having a surface area of 106 acres and a maximum useable storage capacity of less than 600 acre-feet, impounded by (4) Cape Horn Dam, comprised of a 283-foot-long, concrete gravity structure having a maximum height of 63 feet and a 237-foot long earthfill embankment having a concrete core; (5) an intake structure, connected to an inclining horizontal fish screen facility and automatic trash rake, located on the south bank of Van Arsdale Reservoir 400 feet upstream of Cape Horn Dam, connecting to; (6) Tunnel No. 1, comprised of a 5,286-foot long, timber-lined trapezoidal section, 5-foot at top, 6-foot at bottom and 7.2-foot high; (7) a 457-foot-long day-lighted section of pipe and valve connecting Tunnel 1 to Tunnel 2, comprised of a 50-foot-long steel pipe section containing a 72-inch butterfly valve and sand trap, a 367-foot-long, 7-foot-diameter wood stave pipe, a 29-foot long steel pipe, varying in diameter from 7 feet to 7.25 feet, and a 10-foot long 7.25-foot-diameter steel pipe; (8) Tunnel No. 2, comprised of 78-foot long, concrete and steel-lined, circular section, 7.25 feet in diameter and a 729-foot long, concrete-lined, circular section, 7 to 7.25 feet in diameter;

⁷ See *Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, 71 FERC ¶ 62,082 (1995) and *Pacific Gas and Electric Company*, 82 FERC ¶ 62,154 (1998).

⁸ PG&E is no longer maintaining Lake Pillsbury at this normal reservoir elevation. On March 17, 2023, PG&E informed the Commission that due to seismic concerns it is modifying operations at Scott Dam. As an interim risk-reduction measure, PG&E established a 10-foot restriction on the maximum reservoir operating level and instead of closing the spillway gates to store additional water during spring and summer months, the spillway gates are open year-round to maintain water levels in Lake Pillsbury at or below the spillway crest elevation. This operation has reduced the storage capacity in Lake Pillsbury. In the surrender application, PG&E states that Lake Pillsbury’s gross storage capacity is approximately 53,248 acre-feet, with a usable capacity of 43,248 acre-feet. On May 22, 2023, PG&E filed an amendment application to effectively manage water storage, remain in compliance with license requirements, and incorporate this interim risk-reduction measure into the license. The amendment application is currently pending under P-77-318.

(9) an 8.1-foot-long, steel pipe section, tapering from 7.25 to 7 feet in diameter and connecting to a 359-foot-long, 7-foot-diameter, wood stave pipe bifurcating into two 62-inch diameter pipes that connect to two 60-inch diameter gate valves; (10) Penstock No. 1, a 1,793-foot-long, riveted steel pipe, varying in diameter from 62 inches at the gate valve to 48 inches at the powerhouse; (11) Penstock No. 2, a 1,812-foot-long, riveted steel pipe, varying in diameter from 62 inches at the gate valve to 48 inches at the powerhouse; (12) a 30-inch diameter wye branch, supplying water from each penstock to the powerhouse Unit No. 3; (13) an indoor-type powerhouse, containing a 6,500-horsepower, single-runner, horizontal-reaction turbine, directly connected to a 4,400 kilowatt (kW) generator and two 4,000-horsepower, single-runner, horizontal-reaction turbines, directly connected to a 2,559 kW and 3,060 kW generator, respectively; (14) an outdoor 60 kilovolt (kV) switchyard, adjacent to the powerhouse; and (15) 3 concrete tailrace channels joining together 50 feet downstream of the powerhouse, connecting to a 6,420-foot tailrace canal, and discharging into the East Fork Russian River.

2.0 SCOPING

This Scoping Document 1 (SD1) is intended to advise all participants as to the proposed scope of the Commission's NEPA document and to seek additional information pertinent to this analysis. This document contains: (1) a description of the scoping process; (2) a description of PG&E's proposed action and alternatives to the proposed action; (3) a preliminary identification of environmental issues; and (4) a request for comments and information.

2.1 Purposes of Scoping

Scoping is the process used to identify issues, concerns, and opportunities for enhancement or mitigation associated with a proposed action. In general, scoping should be conducted during the early planning stages of a project. The purposes of the scoping process are as follows:

- invite participation of federal, state and local resource agencies, Native-American Tribes, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the public to identify significant environmental and socioeconomic issues related to the proposed surrender;
- determine the resource issues, depth of analysis, and significance of issues to be addressed in the NEPA document;
- identify reasonable alternatives to the proposed action that should be evaluated in the NEPA document;
- identify how the proposed surrender would or would not contribute to reasonable foreseeable cumulative effects in the project area;
- solicit, from participants, available information on the resources at issue; and

- determine the resource areas and potential issues that do not require detailed analysis during review of the project.

2.2 Comments and Scoping Meetings

During preparation of the NEPA document, there will be several opportunities for the resource agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and the public to provide input. In addition to our public notice of the application soliciting comments, motions to intervene and protests issued on October 31, 2025, upcoming opportunities include the following:

- during the public scoping process when we solicit comments regarding the scope of the issues and analysis for the NEPA document; and
- after issuance of the NEPA document when we solicit written comments on the document.

In addition to written comments solicited by this SD1, we will hold two scoping meetings to receive comments on scoping. We invite all interested agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and individuals to attend one or both of these meetings to assist us in identifying the scope of environmental issues that should be analyzed in the NEPA document. Comments filed in response to the Commission's October 31, 2025, do not need to be submitted again as part of scoping. The times and locations of these scoping meetings are as follows:

Evening Scoping Meeting
Date: Tuesday, June 23, 2026
Time: 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. Pacific Time (PT)
Location: Ukiah Valley Conference Center (Chenin Blanc Room), 200 S School Street, Ukiah, CA 95482
Daytime Scoping Meeting
Date: Wednesday, June 24, 2026
Time: 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Pacific Time (PT)
Location: Ukiah Valley Conference Center (Chenin Blanc Room), 200 S School Street, Ukiah, CA 95482

At the start of each scoping meeting, Commission staff will provide a brief overview of the meeting format and objectives. Individual oral comments will be taken on a one-on-one basis with a court reporter (with Commission staff present). This format is designed to receive the maximum number of oral comments in a convenient way during the timeframe allotted. If you wish to speak, Commission staff will hand out

numbers in the order of your arrival. Please see Appendix A for additional information on the session format and conduct.

Scoping comments will be recorded by the court reporter and become part of the public record for this proceeding. Transcripts will be publicly available on FERC's eLibrary system. If a significant number of people are interested in providing comments in the one-on-one settings, a time limit of 3-5 minutes may be implemented for each commentor.

It is important to note that the Commission provides equal consideration to all comments received, whether filed in writing or provided orally at a scoping session. Although there will not be a formal presentation, Commission staff will be available throughout the scoping session to answer your questions about the environmental review process. Representatives from PG&E will also be present.

Interested parties who choose not to speak or who are unable to attend the scoping meetings may provide written comments and information to the Commission as described in section 5.0, Request for Information. These meetings, along with other related information are posted on the Commission's calendar located at <https://www.ferc.gov/news-events/events>. Select "Scoping Meeting" from the dropdown menu near the center of the page.

It is advised that participants review the proposed surrender and non-project use application, filed on July 25, 2025, to prepare for the scoping meetings. These applications may be viewed on the Commission's website (www.ferc.gov), using the "eLibrary" link on the right side of the page. Enter the docket number, P-77, to access the document. For assistance, contact FERC Online Support at FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov or toll free at (866) 208-3676, or for TTY, (202) 502-8659.

Following the scoping meetings and comment period, all issues raised will be reviewed and decisions made as to the level of analysis needed. If preliminary analysis indicates that any issues presented in this scoping document have little potential for causing significant effects, the issue(s) will be identified and the reasons for not providing a more detailed analysis will be given in the NEPA document.

If Commission staff do not receive any substantive comments on SD1, then we will not prepare a Scoping Document 2 (SD2). Otherwise, we will issue SD2 to address any substantive comments received. The SD2 will be issued for informational purposes only; no response will be required. The NEPA document will address recommendations and input received during the scoping process.

3.0 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

In accordance with NEPA, the environmental analysis will consider the following alternatives, at a minimum: (1) the no-action alternative, (2) the applicant's proposed action; and (3) reasonable alternatives to the proposed action.

3.1 No-Action Alternative

Under the no-action alternative, the proposed action would not be authorized. The project would continue to operate as required by the current project license (i.e., there would be no change to the existing environment). No new environmental protection, mitigation, or enhancement measures would be implemented. We use this alternative to establish baseline environmental conditions for comparison with other alternatives.

At this time, we do not consider the no-action alternative to be a reasonable alternative because the applicant determined that the project is uneconomic to operate and would continue to be so with limited capacity, potential increased costs associated with any new license, as well as other challenging financial and operational circumstances. The no-action alternative would require PG&E to obtain a new license for the project; however, PG&E has requested to surrender its FPA license.

3.2 Applicant's Proposed Action

As part of surrender and decommissioning the project features, as shown in Figure 2 below (see also Volume 1A, Section 1.0 and 5.0 of the surrender application), PG&E proposes to:

- Decommission and remove Scott Dam and associated facilities and features;
- Remove certain project recreational facilities (e.g., campgrounds, day-use facilities, kiosk, and boat ramps) and restore associated lands (see Volume II, Section 2.1.2.1, Tables 2.8 and 2.10);
- Decommission and remove Cape Horn Dam and associated facilities and features except those necessary for the New Eel-Russian Facility (NERF) to be operated by the Eel-Russian Project Authority (ERPA);
- Once constructed, remove the NERF facility and associated lands from the existing license; and
- Restore the remnant inundation zone of Lake Pillsbury and Van Arsdale Reservoir, including adjacent riparian, wetlands, and upland areas affected by the decommissioning.

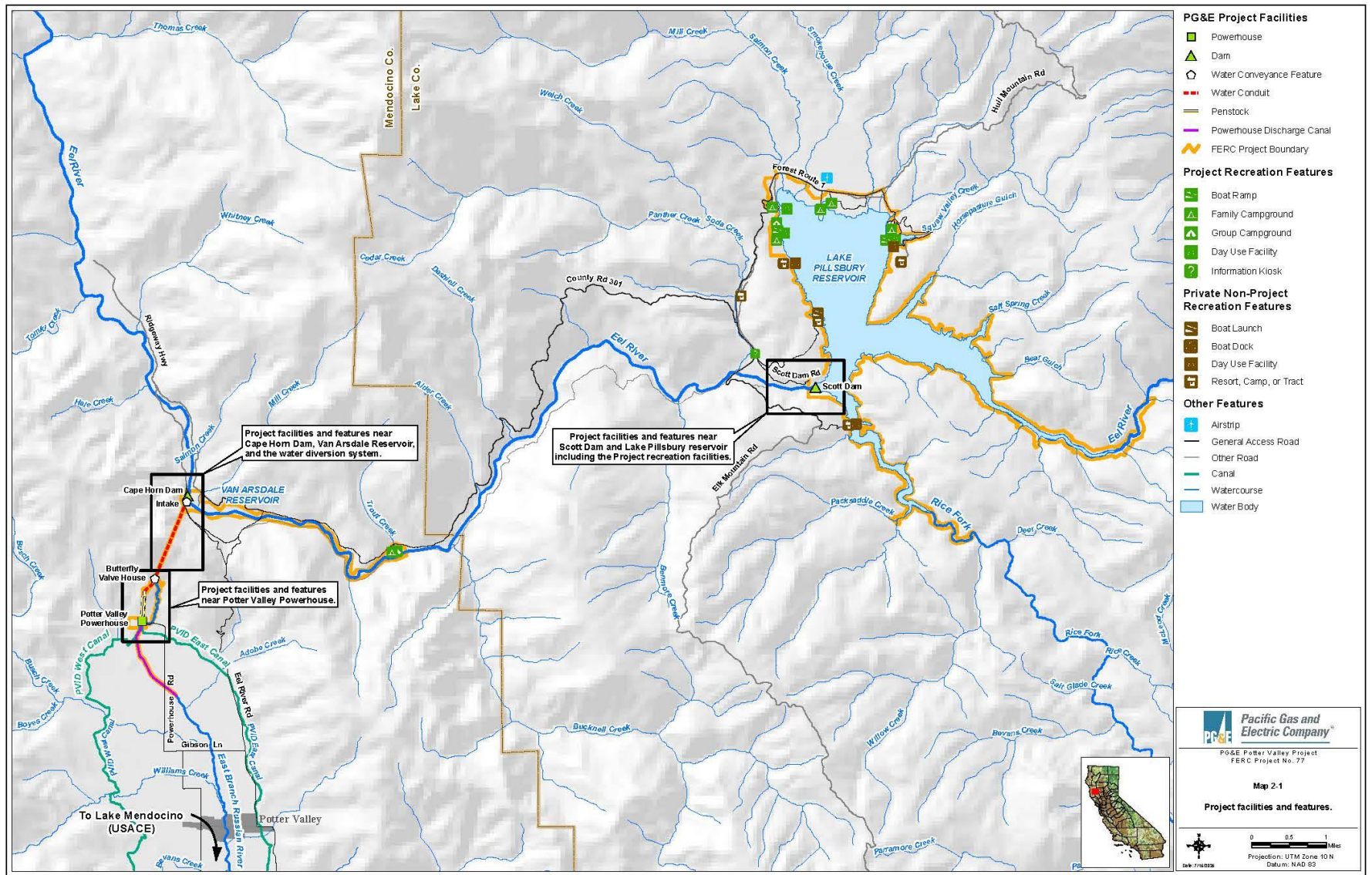


Figure 2. Project facilities and features (Source: PG&E's Application for surrender of license, filed on July 25, 2025).

PG&E requests that the Commission include a condition in any surrender order to remove all lands and project works necessary for the NERF from the project boundary and jurisdiction immediately after completion of the following activities: (1) PG&E has completed decommissioning work at Cape Horn Dam and other works necessary for the NERF; (2) the NERF has been constructed; and (3) PG&E has filed a decommissioning report with the Commission on these actions. The construction of the NERF by the ERPA would occur while the existing license remains in effect. The purpose of the NERF is to accommodate future water diversion from the Eel River through the project's existing water diversion system to the Russian River watershed.

Under the proposed non-project use of project lands (see Volume 1B, Section 5.0), PG&E would allow the ERPA to construct the NERF (see Figure 3 below) and take the following actions:

- Phase 1: Initial mobilization and site preparation;
- Phase 2: Construct in-water components of the NERF while the cofferdams are in place in the Eel River, construct a second bypass inside the Potter Valley Powerhouse that would be used to increase the diversion rate up to 300 cubic feet per second (cfs) and install an energy dissipation valve and associated instrumentation outside the powerhouse; and
- Phase 3: Construct the remaining NERF components near Cape Horn Dam and install necessary mechanical and electrical equipment.

PG&E indicates that the future operation and maintenance of the NERF facility by ERPA would require separate environmental analysis and permits/approvals to be completed by the ERPA.

Proposed environmental protection, mitigation and enhancement measures are described in Volume II, section 2.1.2.2 of the application, and include the development of certain management plans, in consultation with resource agencies, Tribes, and other interested parties. PG&E proposes to file these management plans with the Commission within 24 months of filing the surrender application, i.e., by July 2027. Plans and mitigation measures to be developed for surrender of the project include the following (see Volume II, section 2.1.2.2, Table 2-12): (1) construction management plan; (2) construction site water diversion, dewatering, and drawdown plan; (3) East Branch Russian River diversion plan; (4) public safety plan; (5) water quality and water temperature monitoring plan; (6) aquatic resources management plan; (7) sediment/channel monitoring and response plan; (8) flood monitoring plan; (9) terrestrial wildlife management plan; (10) bald eagle conservation plan; (11) northern spotted owl measures; (12) Scott Dam slope stability monitoring plan; and (13) cultural and Tribal resource measures (to include a memorandum of agreement/historic properties management plan). Overall restoration goals for each project development is described

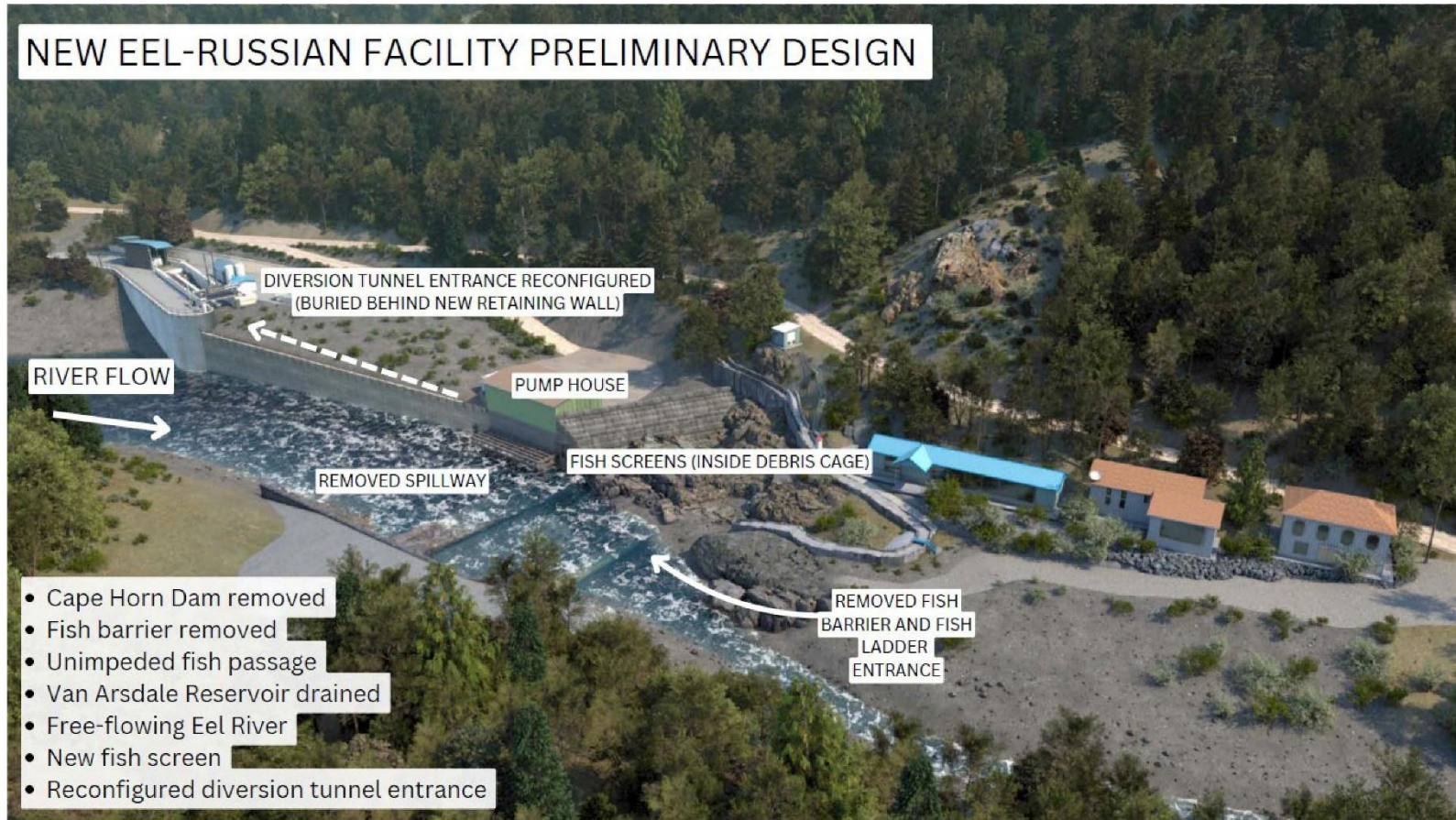


Figure 3-3. NERF preliminary design upstream of deconstructed Cape Horn Dam (artist rendering).

Figure 3. NERF preliminary design (Source: PG&E's application for non-project use of public lands, filed July 25, 2025).

in Table 5.2 (see Volume II, Section 2.1.2.1.1, Table 2-11). Various components of each plan are described in the application.

Plans and mitigation measures proposed to be developed to address and reduce potential effects to environmental and cultural resources during NERF construction (by ERPA) include the following (see Volume II, section 3.1, Table 3-2): (1) construction management plan; (2) bald eagle conservation plan; (3) aquatic resources management plan; (4) construction water quality monitoring plan; (5) construction East Branch Russian River diversion plan; (6) construction site dewatering plan; and (7) cultural and Tribal resource measures.

In general, PG&E proposes to implement best management practices (BMPs), general construction measures, avoidance and protection measures, construction monitoring, and public outreach notification during decommissioning activities (described in Volume II, Section 2.1.2.1.1).

3.3 ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

Commission staff will consider and assess all alternative recommendations for operational or facility modifications, as well as protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures identified by the Commission, the agencies, Native American Tribes, NGOs, and the public.

3.4 Alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study

At present, Commission staff propose to eliminate the following alternatives from detailed study in the NEPA document for the reasons discussed below. In addition, consistent with our Decommissioning Policy,⁹ Commission staff do not consider installation of new facilities, e.g., fish passage facilities, appropriate at the time of project surrender.

3.4.1 Phased Removal of Scott Dam

PG&E considered phased removal of Scott Dam as an alternative in its application. Phased removal would entail successive lowering and notching of Scott Dam such that sediment would be flushed from the reservoir downstream into the Eel River during three different high flow pulses, over consecutive years. Drawdown would be initiated in June-October with a drawdown rate of 1-2 foot/per after the runoff season when inflows are approximately below 400 cfs. PG&E would construct a notch (i.e., a

⁹ *Project Decommissioning at Relicensing*, Policy Statement, FERC Stats. & Regs. ¶ 31,011, at 31,232 (1994) (cross-referenced at 69 FERC ¶ 61,336) (Decommissioning Policy Statement).

50-foot-wide notch) in the dam sufficient to convey anticipated high winter and spring flows. During the first high-flow season (November-May), PG&E would flush approximately 1.1 million cubic yards of sediment. In subsequent low-flow seasons (June-October, for two years), PG&E would continue to lower and notch the dam to a final elevation of 1,810 feet. In the corresponding high-flow seasons (November-May), PG&E would continue to flush sediment (8.5 million cubic yards in the second year and 2.4 million cubic yards in the third year). The remaining dam structure would be removed following the sediment flushing activities.

PG&E eliminated phased removal of Scott Dam as an alternative, because this alternative would not eliminate the potential for unavoidable adverse effects (compared to the proposed action) and would not meet PG&E's interest to expeditiously remove the dams.

3.4.2 Retention of Scott Dam

Commission staff also considered retention of Scott Dam as a separate alternative. Given the seismic stability concerns surrounding the structure, past efforts to find an operator for the project, and PG&E's preferred alternative to remove the structure, staff dismissed this alternative as infeasible.

3.4.3 Surrender and Decommissioning (dam removal) without NERF

Commission staff also considered the surrender and decommissioning of the project without PG&E's non-project use of project lands proposal of ERPA's construction of the NERF. Removal of project facilities without construction of the NERF would eliminate the existing infrastructure necessary for any future diversions to the East Branch of the Russian River and would adversely affect PG&E's obligation to deliver up to 19,000 acre-feet of water to the Potter Valley Irrigation District (see Exhibit E, Volume II, section 3.2.15). Therefore, Commission staff eliminated this alternative.

3.4.4 Federal Government Takeover

In accordance with §16.14 of the Commission's regulations, a federal department or agency may file a recommendation that the United States exercise its right to take over a hydroelectric power project with a license that is subject to sections 14 and 15 of the FPA. We do not consider federal takeover to be a reasonable alternative. Federal takeover of the project would require congressional approval. While that fact alone would not preclude further consideration of this alternative, there is currently no evidence showing that federal takeover should be recommended to Congress. Further, no federal agency has expressed interest in operating the project.

3.4.5 Non-power License

A non-power license under 18 C.F.R. § 16.11 of the Commission's regulations is a temporary license that the Commission would terminate whenever it determines that another governmental agency is authorized and willing to assume regulatory authority and supervision over the lands and facilities covered by the non-power license. At this time, no governmental agency has expressed a willingness to do so. Thus, we do not consider a non-power license a reasonable alternative to surrendering and decommissioning the project.

4.0 SCOPE OF RESOURCE ISSUES

4.1 Cumulative Effects

A cumulative effect is the effect on the environment that results from the incremental effect of the action when added to other past, present, and reasonable foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative effects can result from individually minor but collectively significant actions taking place over a period of time, including hydropower and other land and water development activities.

PG&E states the following actions could cumulatively effect environmental resources in the project area (see Volume II, Exhibit E, Section 2.2.5.4, and Section 3.2.15): (1) construction and operation of the NERF; (2) Sonoma Water's potential water reliability improvements in Potter Valley; (3) implementation of the fisheries restoration activities in the Eel River Restoration and Conservation Plan;¹⁰ (4) development and implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) in both the Eel and Russian River watersheds; (5) implementation of recovery actions for federally protected California Coastal Chinook salmon and the Northern California steelhead DPS pursuant to the Coastal Multispecies Recovery Plan;¹¹ (6) Potter Valley Tribe's Eel River-Trout Creek and Alder Creek Land Acquisition; (7) continued management actions within the Mendocino National Forest, including implementation of the U.S. Forest Service's Mendocino National Forest land and resource management plan (LRMP); (8) potential reductions in snowpack and other weather-related shifts that could alter the timing, magnitude, and quality of flows in both watersheds; and (9) decommissioning of the Potter Valley Project.

¹⁰ See: https://caltrout.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Eel-River-RC-Plan_Final.pdf. Accessed on December 31, 2025.

¹¹ See: https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/2016-multispecies-recovery_plan-vol3.pdf. Accessed on December 31, 2025.

Environmental resources that may be cumulatively affected by the proposed action and other reasonably foreseeable events in the watershed include water use and hydrology, water quality, fish and aquatic resources, botanical resources, wildlife resources, geology and soils, geomorphology, land use, recreation resources, cultural resources, Tribal resources, socioeconomics, noise, and marine resources.

4.2 Resource Issues

In this section, we present a preliminary list of environmental issues to be addressed in the NEPA document. We identified these issues, listed by resource area, by reviewing the surrender application, including the non-project use of project lands, and the Commission's record for the Potter Valley Project. This list is not intended to be exhaustive or final but contains those issues raised to date that could have substantial effects. After the scoping process is complete, we will review the list and determine the appropriate level of analysis needed to address each issue.

4.2.1. Geology and Soils

- Soil disturbance and erosion during construction activities (dam removal and NERF construction);
- Soil contamination from accidental spill of oil, fuel, or other toxic materials during construction;
- Release of naturally occurring asbestos during construction, if present in serpentine rock and disturbed into the air;
- Activation of known landslide area near Scott Dam;
- Slope instability around Lake Pillsbury with drawdown and removal of Scott Dam, which could lead to slope failure and increased sedimentation;
- Release of sediments accumulated behind Scott and Cape Horn dams to the Eel River; and
- Increased likelihood of soil erosion from exposure of previously inundated slopes with dewatering of Lake Pillsbury.

4.2.2. Water Use and Hydrology

- Alteration of hydrology in the Eel River because of Lake Pillsbury drawdown and construction activities (dam removal and NERF construction);
- Alteration of hydrology in the Eel River because of Van Arsdale Reservoir drawdown and installation of dewatering and bypass systems at Cape Horn Dam site;
- Alteration of hydrology in the East Branch Russian River during construction;
- Effects on Eel River hydrology post-removal of dams;
- Effects on downstream Eel River water users;

- Effects of altered hydrology on the East Branch Russian River post-removal of dams, i.e., water supply and flow;
- Effects of drawdown and removal of Lake Pillsbury on groundwater, i.e., local groundwater wells; and
- Effects on flood control.

4.2.3. Water Quality

- Effects on water quality (e.g., turbidity, suspended solids, water temperature, pH, and Dissolved Oxygen) of Eel and East Branch Russian rivers during drawdown, construction activities (dam removal and NERF construction) related to dam removal, as well as post-removal;
- Contamination from pollutant spill during construction;
- Contamination from stormwater runoff during construction;
- Contamination from temporary human waste facilities used during construction;
- Effects on water temperature from removal of cold-water pool (i.e., Lake Pillsbury);
- Effects of fine sediments post-removal;
- Effects of potential release of toxic sediments (e.g., those containing heavy metals and/or other contaminants);
- Effects of increased use of herbicides to prohibit invasive plant spread during construction and restoration activities; and
- Effects on beneficial uses of Lake Pillsbury (e.g., groundwater recharge, freshwater replenishment, navigation, etc.).

4.2.4 Aquatic Resources

- Construction- and decommissioning-related effects resulting in direct loss or disturbance of fish and aquatic species in both watersheds;
- Effects of release of non-native aquatic species from Lake Pillsbury and Van Arsdale Reservoir during construction and after removal;
- Permanent occupation of 0.86 acres of aquatic habitat for improved pump facilities;
- Effects of increased flows in the Eel River watershed and decreased flows in the East Branch Russian River watershed post-removal;
- Post-removal effects of water quality on fish and aquatic species; and
- Changes in habitat availability and volitional passage post-removal.

4.2.5 Marine Resources

- Effects of increased turbidity and suspended sediments during construction, decommissioning, and restoration;
- Effects of general degradation of water quality during construction, decommissioning, and restoration activities;

- Effects of sediment load in the Eel River estuary and nearshore areas after Scott Dam is removed;
- Effects to eelgrass beds in the Eel River estuary;
- Effects to Pacific Coast Salmon essential fish habitat (EFH), Pacific groundfish EFH, coastal pelagic species EFH, and highly migratory species EFH;
- Effects to marine mammals and sea turtles;
- Effects of potential pollutant spills of oil, fuel, or other toxic materials;
- Effects of water contamination from stormwater, nutrient, and bacterial runoff;
- Effects of changes in hydrology in the Eel River; potential blocking of Eel river mouth in Eel River estuary; and
- Effects of changes in unimpaired sediment processes post-construction and restoration.

4.2.6 Botanical Resources

- Direct loss of special-status plants during construction of NERF facility and dam removal, as well as post-removal;
- Indirect effects on vegetation through loss or degradation of habitat, including the introduction or spread of invasive plants during all construction and post-removal restoration activities.
- Reduction in amount of riparian habitat during construction and post-removal restoration both in project area and downstream in the Eel River due to sediment releases associated with dam removal and NERF construction;
- Indirect effects to riparian and wetland habitat along shoreline of Lake Pillsbury and Van Arsdale Reservoir during drawdown;
- Indirect effects to riparian and wetland habitat downstream of the dam sites from increased erosion and potential hazardous material spills during construction, as well as along the Eel River downstream of the project area;
- Beneficial effects to special-status plants, and riparian and wetland habitats from restoration of reservoir footprints and recreation sites; and
- Change in habitat potentially supporting special-status plants in East Branch Russian River following proposed flow conditions.

4.2.7 Wildlife Resources

- Direct effects to breeding or foraging individuals during construction and restoration;
- Direct effects on active nests or disturbance of foraging individuals during construction (dam removal and NERF construction) and restoration activities, including the potential loss of nesting habitat and on aquatic-foraging birds and raptors;

- Indirect effects through a reduction or degradation of habitat resulting from removal of vegetation and/or the introduction of invasive plants during construction;
- Effects of loss of lacustrine habitat to riverine habitat within the former reservoir footprints;
- Effects on wildlife resulting from the potential sediment deposition on downstream riparian/wetland habitat;
- Effects from increase in habitat/vegetation from restoration of the former reservoir footprints;
- Effects on potential wildlife habitat in the East Branch Russian River following changes in flows; and
- Potential for vehicle collision of wildlife individuals during construction and restoration activities.

4.2.8 Threatened and Endangered Species

- Effects of project surrender, construction activities (dam removal and NERF construction), and restoration, on all species listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or proposed for listing under the ESA.

4.2.9 Recreation

- Reduction in recreation opportunities and experience during construction (dam removal and construction of NERF);
- Effects of loss of lake-based recreation and change to riverine recreation opportunities in the Eel River project area;
- Effects of potential increase in uncontrolled off-road vehicle use in the Lake Pillsbury area;
- Permanent closure of certain recreation facilities;
- Effects on recreation use and opportunities along the Rice Fork and Eel River;
- Effects on wildlife viewing, fishing, and hunting on the Eel River and in the Eel River Estuary due to sediment release post-dam removal;
- Effects of changes in groundwater levels on recreation facilities' water supply; and
- Effects on recreation use and opportunities in the East Branch Russian River.

4.2.10 Land Use

- Effects of change in land use from the development of construction and staging areas, as well as the removal of recreation facilities and other ancillary facilities;
- Effects of changes in land use resulting from the construction of the NERF;
- Potential fire risk during construction;
- Effects of reservoir loss as a source of water for wildfire suppression;

- Effects of non-hazardous waste disposal during construction activities (dam removals and NERF construction);
- Construction-related effects on public safety, local traffic, road conditions, and emergency response times;
- Effects of accumulated sediment on flood risk;
- Effects on bridges and road crossings due to flooding;
- Effects of project boundary loss on potential changes to land use; and
- Effects on the Eel River Wild and Scenic River designation (e.g., from dam removal activities and NERF construction).

4.2.11 Aesthetic Resources

- Construction-related effects due to the presence of construction work and staging areas in the project area, including the dewatered reservoirs;
- Construction-related effects on the Eel River Wild and Scenic River designation (e.g., from dam removal activities and NERF construction);
- Effects on scenic corridors during construction and post-removal;
- Effects of reservoir loss and change to riverine setting;
- Effects of initial release of stored water and sediment following removal of the adit (tunnel) plug at Scott Dam and the complete removal of both dams (including pulse flows during drawdown and sediment deposition downstream);
- Effects of sediment load/deposition and turbidity in the Eel River on aesthetics during and after construction;
- Effects of heavy equipment use and ground disturbance during transport of materials to and from the project area;
- Effects from changes in hydrology to Eel River and East Branch Russian River;
- Effects of restored sediment transport and water quality in the Eel River downstream of the project; and
- Effects on aesthetic resources related to changing recreation opportunities in the Lake Pillsbury area.

4.2.12 Socioeconomics

- Effects on water reliability and cost;
- Effects on energy reliability and cost;
- Effects on economic opportunity (e.g., income and employment);
- Effects on population and housing;
- Effects on recreation value;
- Effects on community way of life;
- Effects on local government stability and fiscal conditions;
- Effects on habitat and species-related cultural and economic values;

- Effects of dam removal on residents' property values around Lake Pillsbury; and
- Effects of any reduction in the amount of water available for irrigation on agricultural production.

4.2.13 Cultural and Historic Resources

- Effects of project removal (i.e., draining of reservoirs, removal of project structures);
- Effects of construction activities (dam removal and construction of NERF);
- Changes in use of the property and/or physical features that contribute to historic significance of project;
- Effects of sediment deposition and turbidity on resources downstream in the Eel River;
- Post-removal effects related to unimpaired hydrology and restored sediment transport in Eel River; and
- Post-removal effects related to hydrology changes in the East Branch Russian River.

4.2.14 Tribal Resources

- Effects, both direct and indirect, of construction on Tribal resources including disturbance of human remains;
- Effects, both direct and indirect, of restoration activities on Tribal resources including disturbance of human remains;
- Effects on Tribal resources resulting from changes in character, use, or physical and sensory setting that may diminish religious and/or cultural significance of a resources;
- Effects of exposure and erosion of currently submerged Tribal resources within the reservoirs;
- Effects of disruption in access and use of ethnobiological resources, ceremonial areas, and other Tribal activities from construction activities (dam removal and NERF construction);
- Effects of the loss of facilities or features (e.g., loss of reservoir, ancillary facility, or recreation facility);
- Effects of release of water and sediment releases on Tribal resources downstream of project area;
- Effects to traditional food sources in the Eel River and Eel River Estuary following sediment release post-dam removal;
- Effects of changed hydrology, and restored sediment transport downstream, in the Eel River;
- Effects of changed hydrology in the East Branch Russian River; and
- Effects of restoration of riverbeds and ancillary/recreation following removal.

4.2.15 Air Quality and Noise

- Effects of construction-related equipment (including but not limited to helicopters, tractors, excavators, and cranes) and activities during project removal and construction of NERF, including detonation of the adit (tunnel) plug and general vehicle use;
- Effects of construction-related equipment and activities during restoration activities; and
- Effects of noise and vibration from construction equipment, hauling activities, and movement of materials in project area during removal, construction of NERF, and restoration activities.

4.2.16 Traffic

- Effects of increased construction traffic on local roads during construction and restoration;
- Effects of increased traffic from worker transportation during construction and restoration;
- Effects of any anticipated road closures;
- Effects on emergency vehicles and access; and
- Effects of overall transportation network post removal, including sedimentation effects on roads further away from project.

5.0 REQUEST FOR INFORMATION

We are asking federal, state, and local resource agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and the public to forward to the Commission any information that will assist us in conducting an accurate and thorough analysis of the effects associated with the surrender and decommissioning of the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project, as well as the construction of the NERF, as part of PG&E's application for non-project use of project lands. The types of information requested include, but are not limited to:

- information, quantitative data, or professional opinions that may help define the scope of the analysis, and that helps identify significant environmental issues;
- identification of, and information from any other environmental assessment, EIS, or similar environmental study (previous, ongoing, or planned) relevant to the proposed surrender and decommissioning of the project, and the proposed non-project use of project lands to construct the NERF;
- existing information and any data that would help to describe the past and present actions and effects of the project and other developmental activities on environmental and socioeconomic resources;
- information that would help characterize existing environmental conditions and habitats;

- identification of any federal, state, or local resource plans, and any future project proposals in the affected resource area (e.g., proposals to construct or operate water treatment facilities, water diversions, timber harvests, or fish management programs), along with any implementation schedules;
- documentation that the proposed action would or would not contribute to cumulative adverse or beneficial effects on any resources. Documentation can include, but need not be limited to, how the project would interact with other projects in the area and other developmental activities; study results; resource management policies; and reports from federal, state, and local agencies, Tribes, NGOs, and the public; and
- documentation showing why any resources should be excluded from further study or consideration.

The requested information and comments on SD1 may be filed electronically via the Internet no later than **5:00 pm Eastern Time, July 24, 2026**. All filings must clearly identify the following on the first page: **Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project (P-77-332)**. Scoping comments may be filed electronically via the Internet. See 18 C.F.R. 385.2001(a)(1)(iii) and the instructions on the Commission's website <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOOnline.aspx>. Commenters can submit brief comments up to 10,000 characters, without prior registration, using the eComment system at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx>. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at FERCOOnlineSupport@ferc.gov or toll free at (866) 208-3676, or for TTY, (202) 502-8659. In lieu of electronic filing, you may submit a paper copy. Submissions sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426. Submissions sent via any other carrier must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 12225 Wilkins Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20852.

Register online at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOOnline.aspx> to be notified via email of new filings and issuances related to these or other pending projects. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at FERCOOnlineSupport@ferc.gov.

Intervenors—those on the Commission's service list for this proceeding—are reminded that if they file comments with the Commission, they must also serve a copy of their filing on each person whose name appears on the official service list. Note that the list is periodically updated. The official service list can be obtained on the Commission's website (<https://www.ferc.gov>)—click on Documents and Filing and click on eService—or call the Office of the Secretary, Dockets Branch at (202) 502-8715. In addition, if any party files comments or documents with the Commission relating to the merits of an issue that may affect the responsibilities of a particular resource agency, they must also serve a copy of the document on the resource agency.

Any questions concerning how to file written comments with the Commission should be directed to Diana Shannon at (202) 502-6136 or via email at diana.shannon@ferc.gov. Additional information about the Commission's surrender process and the project may be obtained from the Commission's website, www.ferc.gov.

6.0 CURRENT PROCESSING SCHEDULE

The decision on whether to prepare an EA or an EIS will be made after scoping and review of the comments, as we determined the scope of effects and measures under consideration. Notice of the NEPA document will be distributed to all persons and entities on the Commission's service and mailing lists for the project. The NEPA document will include staff recommendations for any environmental protection and enhancement measures that should be part of any surrender and decommissioning of the project. The comment period will be specified in the notice of availability of the NEPA document.

The major milestones, including PG&E's proposed schedule for filing of the management plans and mitigation measures, are as follows:

Major Milestone	Target Date
Application Filed	July 25, 2025
Public Notice of Application	October 31, 2025
Comment Period Ends	December 19, 2025
Scoping Document 1/Notice Issued	May 22, 2026
Scoping Meetings	June 23-24, 2026
Scoping Document 1 Comments Due	July 24, 2026
Scoping Document 2 (if necessary)	September 15, 2026
PG&E's filing of plans/measures	July 25, 2027

If Commission staff determines that there is a need for additional information or additional scoping, the schedule may be modified. If this occurs, all subsequent milestones would be delayed by the time allowed for the licensee to respond to the Commission's request.

Commission staff's development of a NEPA document is dependent upon the timely filing of PG&E's proposed mitigation plans, as described in Volume II, section 2.1.2.2, and Volume II, section 3.1, Table 3-2. These plans are expected to supplement the surrender application and be filed no later than July 25, 2027.

7.0 MAILING LIST

The list below is the Commission's official mailing list for the Potter Valley Project. If you want to receive future mailings for the project from the Commission and are not included on the list below, please send your request by email to FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov. In lieu of an email request, you may submit a paper request. Submissions sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426. Submissions sent via any other carrier must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 12225 Wilkins Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20852. All written and emailed requests to be added to the mailing list must clearly identify the following on the first page: **Potter Valley Project (P-77-332)**. You may use the same method if requesting removal from the mailing list below.

Register online at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOnline.aspx> to be notified via email of new filings and issuances related to this or other pending projects. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at FERCOnlineSupport@ferc.gov or toll free at 1-866-208-3676, or for TTY, (202) 502-8659.

Official Mailing List for the Potter Valley Project

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APPENDIX A. FERC SCOPING SESSION FORMAT AND CONDUCT

Session Format

FERC is conducting the session to solicit your scoping comments. There will not be a formal presentation by Commission staff; however, FERC staff is available to answer questions about the environmental review process. The session format is as follows:

- Tickets are handed out on a “first come, first serve” basis starting at the time listed in the Notice.
- Individuals are called in ticket number order to provide oral comments to be transcribed by a court reporter for the public record.
- Time limits on oral comments may be enforced to ensure that all those wishing to comment have the opportunity to do so within the designated session time.

Session Conduct

Proper conduct will help the sessions maintain a respectful atmosphere for attendees to learn about the FERC Environmental Review Process and to be able to provide comments effectively.

- Loudspeakers, lighting, oversized visual aids, or other visual or audible disturbances are not permitted.
- Disruptive video and photographic equipment may not be used.
- Conversations should be kept to a reasonable volume. Attendees should be respectful of those providing oral comments to the court reporters.
- Recorded interviews are not permitted within the session space.
- FERC reserves the right to end the session if disruptions interfere with the opportunity for individuals to provide oral comments or if there is a safety or security risk.