

# CHAPTER 1

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## Introduction

### 1.1 History and Overview of Proposed Project

PacifiCorp, in its California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) application for the Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project (A.05-12-011), filed on December 13, 2005, seeks a Permit to Construct (PTC) approximately 18.6 miles of 115 kilovolt (kV) single-circuit transmission line between the Yreka and Weed Junction Substations pursuant to CPUC General Order (GO) 131-D. The application includes the Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) (PacifiCorp, 2005) prepared pursuant to Rule 2.4 of CPUC's Rules of Practice and Procedure.

In its application, PacifiCorp, which currently owns a single-circuit 69 kV electric transmission system in the Yreka-Weed area of Siskiyou County, requested authorization to upgrade the existing 69 kV transmission line (Line 1) with a new 17 mile 115 kV transmission line within existing right-of-way and to install an additional 1.6 miles of 115 kV transmission line within a new right-of-way from the existing Line 1, heading due east to the Weed Junction Substation. The upgraded and new line together would be called Line 75.

The Weed Segment, although not included as part of PacifiCorp's original application, is a planned rebuilding of the Weed Substation and upgrade of approximately 1.5 miles of single-circuit 69kV transmission line to a double-circuit 115kV transmission line (collectively called the Weed Segment) which was added to the CEQA review by order of Commissioner Brown in his "Ruling Regarding Piecemealing and Substations," filed June 5, 2006.

Prior to preparing this CEQA documentation, a Constraints Analysis was conducted to examine the environmental constraints associated with locating the new 1.6-mile segment of the transmission line in the alignment proposed by PacifiCorp (called Option 3 in the PEA) versus an alternative alignment that would follow an existing transmission line into the Weed Junction Substation (called Option 1 in the PEA). Preparation of the Constraints Analysis was ordered by the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) at the CPUC's June 20, 2006 pre-hearing conference in response to protest filings from land owners in the vicinity of the proposed Option 3 alignment.

Under CEQA, the CPUC must prepare an "Initial Study" for discretionary projects such as the Proposed Project to determine whether the project may have a significant adverse effect on the environment. If an Initial Study prepared for a project indicates that such an impact could occur, the CPUC would be required to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). If an Initial Study does not reveal substantial evidence of such an effect, or if the potential effect can be

reduced to a level of insignificance through project revisions, a Negative Declaration can be adopted (Public Resources Code, Division 13, Section 21080(c)(1)-(2)).

A Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) may be adopted when “the initial study has identified potentially significant effects on the environment, but (1) revisions in the project plans or proposals made by, or agreed to by, the applicant before the proposed negative declaration and initial study are released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effect on the environment would occur, and (2) there is no substantial evidence in light of the whole record before the public agency that the project, as revised, may have a significant effect on the environment” (Public Resources Code, Section 21064.5).

A Draft MND was prepared for the Proposed Project and was released on September 1, 2006 for public and agency comment. The CPUC held a public information meeting on September 20, 2006 to describe the Proposed Project and to solicit public comment on the Proposed Project and the Draft MND. The public comment period ended on October 2, 2006, and the CPUC prepared responses to all public and agency comments that had been submitted. A Final MND (SCH #: 2006092006), together with responses to comments, was published on October 17, 2006 (CPUC, 2006).

On October 19, 2006, in decision D.06-10-047, the CPUC adopted the Final MND and approved for construction all portions of the project north of Pole 15/44 (comprising approximately 17 miles of the 18.6-mile transmission line plus rebuilding of the Lucerne Substation). That decision left open for hearings and further evidentiary submissions a short piece of the route at the southern end, termed the “First Project/Southern Portion” (Southern Portion), which had been the subject of dispute among parties to the proceeding.

Construction of the approved portion of the project began in November 2006 and is now completed down to Pole 19/43. To optimize construction efficiency, completion of the remainder of the approved portion from Pole 19/43 south to 14/44 (approximately 0.5 mile in length) is planned to occur with construction of the Southern Portion.

On March 15, 2007, the Commission ruled on the Southern Portion in D.07-03-043, finding that “[e]valuation of other routes is necessary so the Commission may consider the full range of options in this proceeding.” Accordingly, the Commission ordered that an EIR be prepared to evaluate alternative routes for the Southern Portion.

The Weed Segment, which had been previously analyzed in the October 2006 Final MND, was the subject of a separate application by PacifiCorp (A.07-01-046) filed on January 26, 2007 (PacifiCorp, 2007). On April 4, 2007, noting that no decision has yet been made on the Weed Segment application, the CPUC ruled that the Weed Segment shall also be included in the EIR, once again to avoid the issue of piecemealing.

This EIR has been prepared to consider the potential environmental impacts from the Proposed Project Southern Portion and the Weed Segment, and to identify and evaluate a range of alternatives to that portion of the proposed alignment. Hereafter in this EIR, references to the Proposed Project means that portion of the originally-proposed Line 1 project termed the First Project/Southern Portion (or Southern Portion).

## 1.2 Project Objectives, Purpose and Need

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Section 15126.6.a) require that a range of reasonable alternatives to the Proposed Project must be described, analyzed and feasibly attain most of the basis objectives of the Proposed Project. Therefore, in order to explain the need for the Proposed Project, and to guide in development and evaluation of alternatives, PacifiCorp was asked to define its project objectives. PacifiCorp identified the objectives for the Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade in its PEA (PacifiCorp, 2005) as follows:

- **Meet electric system demand** – to ensure that the system has adequate capacity to safely and reliably meet local and contractual electric system demand.
- **Ensure transmission system reliability** – to ensure the area transmission system meets planning criteria by providing an alternative transmission path in case of an outage of Line 14 between Hart Switching Station and Weed Junction by meeting Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) N-1 Criteria (one line out of service).
- **Meet summer 2008 peak loads** – In order to meet this objective, construction must be started in the fall of 2007 as the ground may be too wet for construction in the spring.

Construction of the Proposed Project is needed to complete the Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project to improve reliability by increasing transmission capacity in the Yreka-Weed area in order to continue safe and reliable electric service to customers in the area, and to meet contractual obligations. Additionally, with the continued load growth in the area, Line 14 could be overloaded to the point that it would fail, resulting in a prolonged outage to the area while the line is rebuilt, thus not meeting Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) N-1 Criteria (see Appendix B). Per Category B, Contingency 2 – for the single failure of a transmission line – thermal and voltage limits should not be exceeded, the system should be stable, and firm transfers should not be curtailed. A single failure of Line 14 would result in a failure to meet these criteria.

PacifiCorp identified the objectives for the Weed Segment in its PEA (PacifiCorp, 2007) as follows:

- **Handle increased load** – increase the Weed Substation voltage from 69 to 115 kV and capacity from 12.5 to 25 MVA (megavolt ampere, a measure of apparent power).
- **Provide transmission capacity** – build a looped 115 kV transmission line extension to serve the Weed Substation thereby increasing capacity so that the load can be served.
- **Improve service reliability** – the 115 kV transmission loop would provide two transmission sources with capacity to feed the Weed Substation.

- **Meet summer 2008 peak loads** – In order to meet this objective, construction must be started in the fall of 2007 as the ground may be too wet for construction in the spring.

The Weed Substation is expected to be loaded to 13.15 MVA during the summer of 2008 which would exceed the existing 12.5 MVA transformer capacity by 5%. The overload is anticipated due to a 1.1 MVA industrial block load addition in 2006, combined with an annual load growth of about 350 kW (kilowatt). The 69 kV transmission system presently serving the Weed Substation is inadequate to support the additional load and capacity increase.

## 1.3 Agency Use of This Document

Section 15124(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that an EIR contain a statement briefly describing the intended uses of the EIR. The State CEQA Guidelines indicate that the EIR should identify the ways in which the Lead Agency and any responsible agencies would use this document in their approval or permitting processes. The following discussion summarizes the roles of the agencies and the intended uses of the EIR.

### 1.3.1 CPUC Process

Pursuant to Article XII of the Constitution of the State of California, the CPUC is charged with the regulation of investor-owned public utilities, including PacifiCorp. The CPUC is the lead State agency for CEQA compliance in evaluation of the PacifiCorp's proposed Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project, Southern Portion, and has directed the preparation of this EIR. This EIR will be used by the Commission, in conjunction with other information developed in the Commission's formal record, to act on PacifiCorp's application for a Permit to Construct (PTC) for construction and operation of the Proposed Project. Under CEQA requirements, the CPUC will determine the adequacy of the Final EIR and, if adequate, will certify the document as complying with CEQA. The Commission will also act on PacifiCorp's application for a PTC. If the Commission approves a project with significant and unmitigable impacts, it must state why in a "Statement of Overriding Considerations," which would be included in the Commission's decision on the application.

### 1.3.2 Other Agencies

Several other State agencies will rely on information in this EIR to inform them in their decision over issuance of specific permits related to project construction or operation. In addition to the CPUC, State agencies such as the Department of Transportation, Department of Fish and Game, Regional Water Quality Control Board, and Office of Historic Preservation would be involved in reviewing and/or approving the project. On the federal level, agencies with potential reviewing and/or permitting authority include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

No local discretionary (e.g., use) permits are required, since the CPUC has preemptive jurisdiction over the construction, maintenance, and operation of PacifiCorp facilities in

California. PacifiCorp would still have to obtain all ministerial building and encroachment permits from local jurisdictions, and the CPUC's General Order 131-D requires PacifiCorp to comply with local building, design, and safety standards to the greatest degree feasible to minimize project conflicts with local conditions. The CPUC's authority does not preempt special districts, such as Air Quality Management Districts, or other State agencies or the federal government. PacifiCorp would obtain permits, approvals, and licenses as needed from, and would participate in reviews and consultations as needed with, federal, state, and local agencies as shown in Table 1-1.

**TABLE 1-1  
SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL PERMIT REQUIREMENTS**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Permits and Other Requirements</b>	<b>Jurisdiction/Purpose</b>
<b>Federal Agencies</b>		
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Nationwide Permit, Section 404 of Clean Water Act	Fill in a wetland, water of the U.S.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service	Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation	Consultation on federally-listed species
<b>State Agencies</b>		
California Public Utilities Commission	Permit to Construct	Project approval and CEQA review
California Department of Fish and Game	Endangered Species Act Section 10 Consultation	Consultation on state-listed species
	Fish & Game Code Section 1600 Streambed Alteration Agreement	Alteration or construction in a streambed or drainage channel
State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)	National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 Consultation	Consultation on cultural and/or historic resources
State Water Resources Control Board	NPDES General Permit for Storm water	Construction impacting 1 or more acres
<b>Local Agencies</b>		
Siskiyou County	Encroachment Permit	Crossing of county roads

## 1.4 Public Review and Comment

### 1.4.1 Scoping

On April 13, 2007 pursuant to the State CEQA Guidelines (Sections 21080.4 and 15082(a)), the CPUC provided a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Proposed Project to responsible and trustee agencies and to other interested parties. The NOP solicited both written and verbal comments on the EIR's scope during a 30-day comment period and provided information on a forthcoming public scoping meeting. The CPUC held one public and agency scoping meeting at the College of the Siskiyou Theatre Building, Weed, California on May 2, 2007 from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. to solicit verbal comments on the scope of the EIR.

During the public scoping meeting held on May 2, 2007, participants were able to comment on the scope of issues to be included in the EIR for the Proposed Project and the Weed Segment. Written comments were also collected throughout the public comment period. There were 17 oral comments in the public scoping meeting and 15 letters or e-mails were received during the scoping period. Appendix A to this EIR contains the Scoping Report, which includes a copy of the NOP, the NOP mailing list, a detailed description of all verbal and written comments received, transcripts of the oral comments, and copies of the written comments.

All scoping comments were considered in the preparation of this EIR, except for those comments outside the scope of CEQA review. The Scoping Report in Appendix A describes how the comments are addressed in the EIR and which comments are not covered under CEQA. The overarching themes in the written and oral comments received are as follows:

- General support for upgrading the transmission line, but differing views on which alternative would be the most feasible with the least amount of environmental impacts
- Support and opposition for varying options
- Potential impacts on scenic views, both in Hoy Valley and along Highway 97, a designated National Scenic Byway and County Scenic Highway; as well as an Eligible State Scenic Highway
- Potential health impacts from the electrical infrastructure
- Potential impacts to water quality and water supply in the project area
- Ensure that perceived inadequacies in the NOP and MND will not be repeated
- Potential impacts to the proposed Weed Brethren Church and the Lincoln Heights community.

## 1.4.2 Public Comment on the Draft EIR

This Draft EIR is being circulated to local and state agencies and to interested individuals who may wish to review and comment on the report. Written comments may be submitted to the CPUC during the 45-day public review period. Verbal and written comments on this Draft EIR will be accepted via regular mail, fax, and e-mail and at a noticed public meeting (either noticed in this document or under separate cover). All comments received will be addressed in a Response to Comments addendum document, which, together with this Draft EIR, will constitute the Final EIR for the Proposed Project.

This Draft EIR identifies the environmental impacts of the Proposed Project on the existing environment, indicates how those impacts will be mitigated or avoided, and identifies and evaluates alternatives to the Proposed Project. This document is intended to provide the CPUC with the information required to exercise its jurisdictional responsibilities with respect to the Proposed Project, which would be considered at a separate noticed public meeting of the CPUC.

CEQA requires that a Lead Agency shall neither approve nor implement a project as proposed unless the significant environmental impacts have been reduced to an acceptable level. An acceptable level is defined as eliminating, avoiding or substantially lessening significant

environmental effects to below a level of significance. If the Lead Agency approves the project, even though significant impacts identified in the final EIR cannot be fully mitigated, the Lead Agency must state in writing the reasons for its action. Findings and a Statement of Overriding considerations (SOC) must be included in the record of project approval and mentioned in the Notice of Determination (NOD).

## 1.5 Issues Considered and Found Not to be Significant

Since the Final Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) was adopted (CPUC, 2006), the project description for the Proposed Project and Weed Segment has not changed in such a manner that would affect the impact conclusions related to *Geology, Soils, and Seismicity* (Section 2.6 of the MND); *Mineral Resources* (Section 2.10 of the MND); and *Population and Housing* (Section 2.12 of the MND). Therefore, those sections are summarized below and are incorporated into this EIR by reference and will not be addressed further in this document.

### 1.5.1 Geology, Soils, and Seismicity

The MND found that there are no known active faults underlying, or adjacent to, the Proposed Project and the Weed Segment. Moreover, the State of California Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zones has not been established in the study area; therefore, the potential impact of fault rupture to the Proposed Project and Weed Segment would be less than significant. The MND also found that impacts related to the potential for seismic ground shaking, liquefaction, landslides, slope failures, and soil erosion or loss of topsoil would be less than significant because active faults are relatively distant from the study area. Furthermore, the MND noted that these issues would be addressed in the more detailed design-level geotechnical investigation which would recommend engineering and construction measures that would avoid these impacts. With regard to the potential of locating the Proposed Project and Weed Segment on destabilized slopes or expansive soils, the MND determined that standard engineering design features and construction procedures would be implemented; therefore, the MND found this impact to be less than significant.

With regard to the alternatives analyzed in this EIR (see Chapter 3, *Alternatives and Cumulative Projects* for further description of the alternatives), the impacts related to geology, soils, and seismicity would also be less than significant as the construction activities associated with the alternatives would be almost identical to the Proposed Project and Weed Segment; the alternatives would be located within the same geological setting where similar soil conditions exist and standard engineering design features and construction procedures would also be implemented. Therefore, implementation of any of the alternatives would result in less than significant impacts related to geology, soils, and seismicity.

### 1.5.2 Mineral Resources

The MND found that there were no known economically viable sources of rock materials or unique geologic features identified in the vicinity of the Proposed Project and Weed Segment areas; therefore, there is no potential for the Proposed Project and Weed Segment to result in the

loss of mineral or unique geologic features. Furthermore, the MND determined that the Proposed Project and Weed Segment would not result in the loss of any availability of locally-important minerals as they would not traverse areas currently used to extract known mineral resources.

With regard to the alternatives analyzed in this EIR (see Section 3, *Alternatives and Cumulative Projects* for further description of the alternatives), there would be no impacts related mineral resources as there are no known economically viable sources of rock materials or unique geologic features identified in the vicinity of the alternatives; and the alternatives would only require minimal excavation and grading, and would not result in the loss of any availability of locally-imported minerals as the alternatives traverse no areas currently used to extract known mineral resources. Therefore, implementation of any of the alternative would result in no impacts to mineral resources.

### 1.5.3 Population and Housing

The MND found that construction activities associated with the Proposed Project and Weed Segment, due to there temporary nature, would not result in any direct growth-inducing impacts, would not result in any significant increase of local population or housing, and would not indirectly induce growth by creating new opportunities for local industry or commerce. Additionally, the MND determined that the Proposed Project and the Weed Segment would not result in the displacement of existing housing or people because part of the Proposed Project and the entirety of the Weed Segment would traverse existing PacifiCorp right-of-way generally paralleling local, county and state roads as well as traversing ranches, farms and open space. The MND found that the new 1.6-mile segment associated with the Proposed Project would generally traverse ranches and farms and would be located within a new right-of-way and therefore would not displace any people or housing.

With regard to the alternatives analyzed in this EIR (see Section 3, *Alternatives and Cumulative Projects* for further description of the alternatives), the impacts related to population and housing would also be less than significant as the construction crews would be similar in number (between 30 and 35 crew members) as identified and analyzed for the Proposed Project and Weed Segment. Accordingly, there would not be a substantial increase in population as these workers would likely leave upon completion of an alternative. Furthermore, the alternatives would be located within an existing ROW and would therefore not result in the displacement of existing housing or people necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. Therefore, implementation of any of the alternatives would results in less than significant impacts to population and housing.

## 1.6 Reader's Guide to This EIR

This EIR is organized as follows:

**Executive Summary.** Provides a summary description of the Proposed Project, the alternatives, their respective environmental impacts and the Environmentally Superior Alternative. Also provides a tabulation of the impacts and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and alternatives.

**Section 1.0, Introduction.** Provides a discussion of the background, purpose and need for the project, briefly describing the proposed Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project, Southern Portion, and outlining the public agency use of the EIR.

**Section 2.0, Project Description.** Provides a detailed description of the proposed Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project, Southern Portion.

**Section 3.0, Alternatives and Cumulative Projects.** Provides a description of the alternatives screening and evaluation process, description of alternatives considered but eliminated from further analysis and the rationale therefore, and description of the alternatives analyzed in Section D. Also identifies the cumulative projects considered in the analysis of cumulative impacts.

**Section 4.0, Environmental Analysis.** Provides a comprehensive analysis and assessment of impacts (including cumulative impacts) and mitigation measures for the Proposed Project and several alternatives, including the No Project Alternative. This section is divided into main sections for each environmental issue area (e.g., Air Quality, Biological Resources) that contain the environmental settings, impacts, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Project and each alternative. At the end of each issue area analysis, a Mitigation Monitoring table is provided.

**Section 5.0, Comparison of Alternatives.** Identifies the CEQA Environmentally Superior Alternative and provides a discussion of the relative advantages and disadvantages of the Proposed Project and the alternatives that were evaluated.

**Section 6.0, CEQA Statutory Sections.** Provides a discussion of growth-inducing impacts, irreversible environmental changes, and cumulative impacts.

**Section 7.0, Report Preparers.** Identifies the primary authors of this Draft EIR

**Section 8.0, Mitigation Monitoring, Reporting, and Compliance Plan.** Provides a discussion of the CPUC's mitigation monitoring program requirements for the project as approved by the CPUC.

**Appendix A** contains the mailing list, the Notice of Preparation (NOP), and copies of comments received on the NOP. Other technical appendices are also included in this Draft EIR.

## References – Introduction

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), 2006. *Final Mitigated Negative Declaration, PacifiCorp's Application to Construct the Yreka-Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project, CPUC A.05-12-011, SCH #2006092006*, October 2006.

PacifiCorp, 2005. *Proponent's Environmental Assessment for the Yreka / Weed Transmission Line Upgrade Project*, November 2005.

PacifiCorp, 2007. *Proponent's Environmental Assessment for the Weed Segment Project*, January 25, 2007.