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PUBLIC MEETING FOR KERCKHOFF HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT
RELICENSING DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC MEETING

HELD VIA ZOOM ON

THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2026

4:02 P.M.

1001 I STREET

SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA 95814

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1 REMOTE APPEARANCES

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REPRESENTING DWR SWRCB:
Nathan Fisch, Sr. Environmental Scientist
Chase McCormick, Environmental Scientist
Parker Thaler, Program Manager
Wilhelmina Chon, Environmental Scientist
Waverly Patterson, Analyst II
Amaris Fraley, Admin
Karen Bishop,
Regulatory Consultant, Kleinschmidt Associates
Garrett Lenahan, Attorney

SPEAKERS RE: PUBLIC HEARING
Dave Steindorf, American Whitewater

1 PUBLIC MEETING FOR KERCKHOFF HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT
2 RELICENSING DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
3 HELD VIA ZOOM ON
4 THURSDAY, APRIL 30, 2026
5 4:02 P.M.
6

7 NATHAN FISCH: All right. Well, it's 4:02
8 so I think we can get started. Hello, everyone. My
9 name is Nathan Fisch, and I'm a senior environmental
10 scientist at the California State Water Resources
11 Control Board, and the water quality certification
12 program. Appreciate your attendance and your
13 interest in this project.

14 So this meeting is in response to the
15 April 10th release of a draft Environmental Impact
16 Report for the Kerckhoff Hydroelectric Project
17 relicensing. So there's a lot of folks in the room
18 here today from the State Water Board.

19 We have Chase McCormick, a environmental
20 scientist and project manager for Kerckhoff. We
21 have Garrett Lenahan, our attorney for this project.
22 Wilhelmina Chon, an environmental scientist
23 assisting on this project. Parker Thaler, our
24 program manager, Waverly Patterson an analyst with
25 the program. And then we also have Karen Bishop

1 with Kleinschmidt and Associates here.

2 With that, we will hop into our
3 presentation outline and give you a rundown of what
4 we're going to be discussing today.

5 Next slide, please.

6 So what's the plan for today? In a few
7 minutes, Chase is going to provide some background
8 on the State Water Board and water quality
9 certifications. Then we'll briefly provide a
10 overview of the California Environmental Quality Act
11 process and how the public can provide input. Then
12 we'll walk through an overview of the Kerckhoff
13 Hydroelectric Project relicensing and PG&E's
14 application for water quality certification.

15 Then after this, we'll discuss how
16 everyone can stay informed with the State Water
17 Board's process. And then finally, we'll open the
18 floor to receive verbal comments from any meeting
19 participants that are present with us today.

20 Next slide, please.

21 So before we begin, just some meeting
22 logistics and ground rules. So this is a virtual
23 meeting, so remain on mute during the duration of
24 this meeting. Please respect all speakers and
25 speakers' viewpoints, and please only have one

1 person speak at a time.

2 As a reminder, this meeting is being video
3 recorded and documented by a court reporter. So
4 when you speak today, please do your best to slow
5 down and enunciate as best as possible. Both the
6 meeting transcript and the presentation will be
7 posted on the project's State Water Board website in
8 the coming weeks. We've included a link at the
9 bottom of this page and we'll also show it at the
10 end of the presentation.

11 And then lastly, like I said, please save
12 all comments to the public comment portion of this
13 presentation at the end. With that, I can hand it
14 over to Chase.

15 CHASE MCCORMICK: Thank you for the
16 introduction, Nathan. Hello, everyone. My name is
17 Chase McCormick and I'm an environmental scientist
18 in the Division of Water Rights and the project
19 manager for the Kerckhoff Hydroelectric Project.

20 So let's dig into why the State Water
21 Board is involved. The State Water Board has
22 authority over water rights and water quality in
23 California, and our mission is to preserve, enhance,
24 and restore the quality of California's water
25 resources as well as protect and allocate water for

1 many beneficial uses.

2 So we're here today because section 401 of
3 the Clean Water Act requires that any applicant
4 seeking a federal license or permit where the
5 proposed activity may result in a discharged surface
6 water is required to obtain a water quality
7 certification from the State Water Board. The State
8 Water Board conditions hydroelectric projects via
9 water quality certifications to ensure the
10 protection of the state's waters.

11 So now I'd like to go over water quality
12 certification and how it's related to PG&E's
13 application for a new federal license. Water
14 quality certifications focus on protecting water
15 quality and beneficial uses of water. If a water
16 quality certification is issued, the conditions in
17 it become a mandatory part of the Federal Energy
18 Regulatory Commission license for the project,
19 otherwise known as FERC.

20 Water Quality Certifications ensure that a
21 project will comply with water quality objectives
22 and beneficial uses as outlined in the Regional
23 Water Quality Control plans, which are also known as
24 basin plans. In Kerckhoff's case, the Central
25 Valley Regional Water Quality Control plans as

1 adopted by the Central Valley Regional Water Quality
2 Control Board.

3 So certifications must also ensure with
4 water quality control policies and other -- other
5 applicable requirements of state law. For example,
6 the certification will require compliance with the
7 board's dredge fill procedures to ensure protection
8 of state -- state waters, including wetlands.

9 And PG&E applied for a water quality
10 certification for its proposed project on July 16th,
11 2025. However, before the State Water Board can
12 issue a water quality certification, it must first
13 comply with the California Environmental Quality Act
14 or CEQA, which I'll cover in the next slide.

15 So that leads us to CEQA. CEQA informs
16 the State Water Board agencies, California Native
17 American tribes, the public, and other interested
18 parties about the proposed project's potentially
19 significant environmental effects and ways to avoid,
20 minimize, or mitigate those impacts.

21 So the State Water Board is the lead
22 agency for CEQA and has prepared the CEQA document.
23 In this case, the State Water Board prepared a type
24 of CEQA document called an Environmental Impact
25 Report or an EIR. This CEQA document will be used

1 to inform the water quality certification for the
2 proposed project. And generally speaking, the State
3 Water Board cannot issue a water quality
4 certification without completing CEQA.

5 So let's take a look at the State Water
6 Board CEQA process. So in 2021, the State Water
7 Board issued a notice of informal consultation to
8 responsible and trustee agencies regarding the
9 determination for the appropriate CEQA document.

10 And following this notice, the State Water Board
11 determined that an Environmental Impact Report was
12 the appropriate CEQA document.

13 And this flow chart on the slide provides
14 a high-level overview of the State Water Board's
15 CEQA process. After an Environmental Impact Report
16 is deemed necessary, a notice of preparation, or an
17 NOP, is released by the State Water Board, which in
18 this case it was issued on May 30th, 2023.

19 After this, the State Water Board conducts
20 scoping meetings, which again in our case was held
21 on June 15th, 2023. After this, a draft
22 Environmental Impact Report is released for public
23 comment for a minimum of 45 days. And the draft EIR
24 for the Kerckhoff project was released on April
25 10th, 2026.

1 So after this public comment period
2 concludes, which for the draft EIR is May 26th,
3 2026, the State Water Board will then review and
4 respond to any public input that was received. And
5 following this, the State Water Board will issue a
6 final EIR for the project. And the State Water
7 Board's decision on the water quality certification
8 will then be informed by the final EIR.

9 So now that we have a background on the
10 State Water Board, water quality certifications and
11 the CEQA process, let's dive into the -- an overview
12 of the Kerckhoff Hydroelectric Project. So the
13 Kerckhoff Hydroelectric Project is owned and
14 operated by PG&E. It's located on the San Joaquin
15 River right on the border of Fresno and Madera
16 counties.

17 Major project features include Kerckhoff
18 Dam which houses 14 radio gates, and three low level
19 outlets. There's two powerhouses, K1 and K2, with a
20 combined install capacity of 162.72 megawatts,
21 Kerckhoff Reservoir which has an approximate usable
22 capacity of around 2,400 acre feet.

23 There is a recreation area known as the
24 Smalley Cove Recreation Area, and then land
25 ownership within and -- and around the project

1 boundary includes PG&E, the U.S. Forest Service, the
2 Bureau of Land Management, the Bureau of
3 Reclamation, the State of California, and then some
4 other private ownerships sprinkled in.

5 So now let's -- let's review what the
6 proposed project covers. So the proposed project is
7 how PG&E proposes to construct and operate the
8 project under the new FERC license. PG&E proposes
9 to continue Kerckhoff project operations with a
10 couple of the following changes.

11 This includes proposed boundary updates,
12 which can include reductions and/or additions in
13 certain parts of the FERC boundary where necessary,
14 proposed updates to project facilities, including
15 the retirement of the K1 powerhouse and modifying or
16 retiring its associated facilities, which would
17 leave only the K2 powerhouse operational under the
18 proposed project.

19 Additionally, the construction of a new
20 inflow gauge above Kerckhoff Reservoir and the
21 development of a new recreation area called the
22 Vista Day Use Area. In addition to this, PG&E has
23 proposed 16 new environmental management measures
24 and plans, which we'll dive a little bit deeper into
25 on the next slide.

1 So 16 new environmental management
2 measures and plans is a lot to take in. But to
3 provide a high-level overview, shown here are the
4 slides, are the plans and measures proposed by PG&E.
5 These measures and plans cover resources such as
6 aquatic and terrestrial life, roads, trails, as well
7 as recreation. But there's also plans for
8 construction activities such as the retirement of
9 the K1 powerhouse and the construction of the new
10 inflow gauge.

11 For a more detailed discussion of what
12 each measure proposes, please take a look at PG&E's
13 March of 2023 supplement to their final license
14 application that's available on the FERC docket, or
15 you can review the project description of the draft
16 EIR.

17 So now let's talk about the alternatives
18 to the proposed project that the State Water Board
19 staff analyze in the draft EIR. As the CEQA lead
20 agency, the State Water Board was responsible for
21 identifying two project alternatives, not including
22 the no project alternative.

23 For context, the no project alternative is
24 the continued operation of the existing project.
25 That means there would be no implementation of new

1 environmental management measures, no development of
2 the Vista Day Use Area, and the K1 powerhouse would
3 not be officially retired.

4 This alternative was analyzed in the draft
5 EIR, however, we're going to focus on one and two.

6 Alternative one is the proposed project with
7 alternative spill recession and flow ramping. So
8 this alternative is comprised of two components that
9 replace ramping operations of the proposed project.

10 The first being the implementation of
11 BLM's preliminary 4(e) condition number four as
12 submitted to FERC in September of 2024. This
13 component would fully replace the following
14 applicant proposed measures such as the end of spill
15 flow recession and whitewater flow release measure,
16 the subsequent spill ramp down measure, and the down
17 ramping components of the spill season flow measure.

18 The second component is the implementation
19 of a one foot per hour ramp-up rate also known as
20 the alternative one ramp-up measure. The
21 alternative ramp-up measure would replace the ramp-
22 up components of PG&E spill season flow measure and
23 the planned outage measure.

24 And with that, let's take a look at
25 alternative two. So as stated at the top of the

1 slide, alternative two is the proposed project, but
2 with implementation of BLM's revised 4(e)
3 conditions. So in May of 2025, BLM/DOI issued
4 revised 4(e)'s that were modified versions of PG&E's
5 proposed flow measures.

6 The modified measures will replace the
7 following equivalent measures under the proposed
8 project. This includes the end of spill flow
9 recession and whitewater flow release measure, the
10 spill season flow measure, the planned outage
11 measure, and the removal of any ramp-up related
12 measure.

13 The changes to PG&E's proposed flow
14 management measures under the revised 4(e)s
15 primarily revolve around shortening or extending the
16 amount of time in a given down ramping step, or
17 include one additional step to the beginning of a
18 down ramping measure.

19 So with that, let's discuss potentially
20 significant impacts that were identified in the
21 draft EIR. So potentially significant impacts that
22 were mitigated to less than significant were
23 identified in the following CEQA resource areas.
24 This includes the biological resources aquatics,
25 geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials,

1 and then hydrology and water quality.

2 And since alternative one and two maintain
3 activities and resource plans of the proposed
4 project outside of the replacement of flow related
5 measures, the construction and operation related
6 impacts of alternative one and two result in the
7 same impact calls as the proposed project for these
8 resource areas.

9 So now we move to significant unavoidable
10 impacts. If impacts are not mitigated, then the
11 following resource areas may result in at least one
12 significant and avoidable impact. These resource
13 areas include air quality, biological resources
14 terrestrial, as well as hydrology and water quality.

15 So now that we have a background on the
16 proposed project and the alternatives, let's take a
17 look at some of the next steps in the CEQA process.
18 So now that the draft EIR has been released for
19 public comment, once that comment period is closed,
20 the next step in the CEQA process is that the State
21 Water Board will review and respond to comments and
22 prepare the final EIR. And then once that has been
23 completed, the State Water Board will issue the
24 final EIR.

25 And so with that, let's discuss how we

1 will handle receiving public input during this
2 meeting. So to request a comment, please use the
3 raise hand feature to indicate that you would like
4 to provide your comment verbally.

5 If you could, please wait to be called on
6 and then unmute your microphone. It'd be great to
7 start with an introduction of yourself and then your
8 affiliation, who you're here with prior to speaking.
9 We do ask to please be respectful of time limits, so
10 we'll kind of establish how much time each person
11 gets once we get an idea of how many people want to
12 speak and then we can have a little bit of time
13 after that.

14 So with that, I would like to have
15 everyone who would like to speak to use the raise
16 their hand feature and then we can dictate how much
17 time each person should get to start off. I can see
18 we got Dave.

19 NATHAN FISCH: So I just see one. So
20 Dave, let's start with five minutes. If -- at the
21 conclusion of that, if no one else wants to speak,
22 if you have more then we'll let you -- we'll give
23 you additional time. So with that, I can unmute
24 you.

25 DAVE STEINDORF: Promise I won't go a full

1 hour. Hi, my name's Dave Steindorf. I'm with
2 American Whitewater. I'm a hydropower specialist,
3 and over the past 20 years I've worked on all of the
4 relicensings in the San Joaquin watershed.

5 So I'd like to focus on alternatives one
6 and two in the draft EIR and whether the analysis
7 supporting them is -- is adequate. Alternative one
8 reflects a consensus recommendation of state and
9 federal resource agencies and stakeholders including
10 BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park
11 Service, U.S. Forest Service, California Department
12 of Fish and Wildlife, and American Whitewater.

13 As you just reviewed, it has two pretty
14 straightforward components. First, passing the LTOR
15 flows from Southern California Edison's Big Creek
16 Project through the Kerckhoff bypass reach. These
17 flows were developed over decades to restore key
18 components of the natural snow melt hydrograph and
19 are already required on Southern California's
20 Edison's upstream projects. This is not new; it's
21 simply the completing of an existing restoration
22 framework.

23 Second, the one foot per hour ramping rate
24 for public safety, which is standard requirement
25 across hydropower projects in California. The need

1 for this is clear, flow changes below Kerckhoff Dam
2 can be extreme. In 2018 flows increased from
3 roughly 60 CFS to 6,000 CFS in minutes resulting in
4 a fatality. That risk remains today.

5 Despite this, PG&E continues to claim that
6 it cannot meet these requirements due to upstream
7 operations and limited storage. That claim is not
8 supported by the available evidence. The upstream
9 powerhouse that PG&E points to has a capacity of
10 3,500 CFS yet we routinely see observed downstream
11 fluctuations of 4,000 to 8,000 CFS. The only
12 plausible explanations are -- are releases from
13 Kerckhoff Reservoir storage.

14 This is not a complicated issue to
15 resolve. The board should require hourly or 15-
16 minute reservoir storage data and gate operations
17 record. This data would resolve this question
18 immediately, and the fact that they have not been
19 provided and are not required in this EIR is a
20 significant deficiency.

21 Turning to the draft EIR appendix
22 modeling, which concludes that PG&E cannot reliably
23 meet the -- the LTOR flow requirements. There's
24 several serious problems with this analysis. First,
25 much of the justification appears to rely on

1 communications with PG&E that are not included in
2 the record. If the board is relying on those
3 communications, they must be disclosed so that the
4 analysis can be independently evaluated.

5 Second, it is unclear why the modeling
6 does not rely on recent -- recent hydrology,
7 particularly the past several years where LTOR flows
8 have actually been implemented upstream. Real world
9 data exists that should be the foundation of this
10 analysis.

11 Third, the conclusion that PG&E cannot
12 meet the LTOR flows is driven in large part by
13 constraints associated with the Kerckhoff powerhouse
14 rough operating zones or ROZs. ROZs are not a
15 natural constraint. They're a mechanical and
16 operational limitation of generation units,
17 typically related to vibration, cavitation, or
18 inefficient operating ranges.

19 These are engineering issues. They're not
20 fixed environmental constraints, and they can be
21 addressed through turbine upgrades, operational
22 changes or by bypassing generation when necessary.
23 The EIR treats these limitations as permanent and
24 then uses them to constrain environmental
25 protection. That sets a troubling precedent.

1 Finally, it's important to understand how
2 alternative to specifically the Bureau of Land
3 Management's revised 4(e) conditions came to be. As
4 I mentioned before, all of the resource agencies
5 recommended the same flow and ramping conditions
6 included in alternative one.

7 PG&E challenged those through a trial type
8 hearing process. That process did not result in a
9 scientific finding that the original conditions were
10 infeasible. Instead, it led to a series of closed
11 door negotiations between -- between PG&E and
12 interior agencies where other stakeholders were
13 excluded.

14 Notably, while the conditions themselves
15 were revised, the underlying agency rationale was
16 not meaningfully changed. The scientific and public
17 safety justification for the original requirements
18 remains intact. That's important context. The
19 revisions of a negotiated outcome, not a
20 determination based on new data or analysis that the
21 original recommendations were flawed.

22 So the State Water Board has an important
23 role here. This is an important opportunity to
24 ensure that the original science and public safety
25 objectives and agency intent by this project are

1 carried forward. This requires a complete and
2 transparent record. At a minimum, the board should
3 require full disclosure of operational data,
4 inclusion of all relied upon communications in the
5 record, a revised analysis grounded in actual
6 hydrology and realistic operational flexibility.

7 We believe that this information will make
8 it clear that alternative one is the superior
9 alternative and should be adopted by the board.

10 Thank you.

11 CHASE MCCORMICK: Thank you, Dave. We
12 appreciate your input.

13 Is there anybody else who would like to
14 leave a comment for us? Give you a little bit of
15 time, maybe. Some thoughts formulating.

16 (Pause in the meeting.)

17 CHASE MCCORMICK: Let me get to 4:25.

18 Then if --

19 (Pause in the meeting.)

20 CHASE MCCORMICK: Okay. So we've given a
21 little bit of time. I'm not seeing anybody else
22 who's wanting to provide comment but we appreciate
23 your input, Dave.

24 And with that, I think I can move on to
25 how we can stay informed with the Kerckhoff

1 Hydroelectric Project moving forward and future --
2 future postings related to Kerckhoff.

3 So a great way, probably the best way to
4 stay informed is to keep an eye on the State Water
5 Board's Kerckhoff Hydroelectric Project webpage.
6 This is where our public postings will be added with
7 links to any given document that we publish.

8 This includes the notice of availability
9 and where copies of the draft EIR can be located, a
10 virtual copy of the draft EIR as well as the draft
11 EIR's appendices. And these slides will be publicly
12 available on the website as well.

13 So with that, let's move to our final
14 slide about where we go from here. So we'll be
15 accepting written comments until 5:00 p.m. Pacific
16 Standard Time on May 26, 2026. Please send any
17 comments to me by email or by mail at the email or
18 physical address provided on the slide. As I
19 mentioned, these slides will be publicly available
20 on the Kerckhoff webpage.

21 So if we don't have my -- if we don't have
22 any other comments, we can stick around for a little
23 bit. But if there's nothing else, then we can
24 likely adjourn. I'll give it another minute or so
25 to see if anyone has a comment.

1 (Pause in the meeting.)

2 CHASE MCCORMICK: Okay. Well, I -- I
3 think we can call it. I want to say thank you to
4 everyone for hopping in.

5 Thank you, Dave, for the input and yeah,
6 keep -- keep posted on the Kerckhoff page for the
7 final EIR which include responses to any comments.
8 Yeah. Thank you, guys, all for your time today.

9 NATHAN FISCH: Thank you.

10 (WHEREUPON, the PUBLIC MEETING concluded
11 at 4:30 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE

I, Lesli Hinshaw, do hereby certify that I reported all proceedings adduced in the foregoing matter and that the foregoing transcript pages constitutes a full, true and accurate record of said proceedings to the best of my ability.

I further certify that I am neither related to counsel or any party to the proceedings nor have any interest in the outcome of the proceedings.

IN WITNESS HEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 13th day of May, 2026.



Lesli Hinshaw, CER No. 5217

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10th 3:15 8:25	4,000 17:11	addressed 18:21	applicant 6:3 12:14
14 9:18	401 6:2	adequate 16:7	application 4:14 6:13 11:14
15- 17:15	45 8:23	adjourn 21:24	applied 7:9
15th 8:21	4:02 3:7	adopted 7:1 20:9	approximate 9:21
16 10:23 11:1	4:25 20:17	affiliation 15:8	April 3:15 8:24
162.72 9:20	<hr/> 5 <hr/>	agencies 7:16 8:8 16:9 19:4,12	aquatic 11:6
16th 7:10	5:00 21:15	agency 7:22 11:20 19:15,25	aquatics 13:24
<hr/> 2 <hr/>	<hr/> 6 <hr/>	air 14:13	area 9:23,24 10:21,22 12:2
2,400 9:22	6,000 17:3	allocate 5:25	areas 13:23 14:8, 11,13
20 16:3	60 17:3	alternative 11:22, 23 12:4,6,7,8,20, 21,25 13:1 14:2,6 16:7 19:2,6 20:8, 9	assisting 3:23
2018 17:2	<hr/> 8 <hr/>	alternatives 11:17,21 14:16 16:5	Associates 4:1
2021 8:6	8,000 17:11	American 7:17 16:2,12	attendance 3:12
2023 8:18,21 11:13	<hr/> A <hr/>	amount 13:16	attorney 3:21
2024 12:12	accepting 21:15	analysis 16:6 17:24 18:4,10 19:20 20:5	authority 5:22
2025 7:11 13:3	acre 9:22	analyst 3:24	availability 21:8
2026 8:25 9:3 21:16	Act 4:10 6:3 7:13	analyze 11:19	avoid 7:19
26 21:16	activities 11:8 14:3	analyzed 12:4	avoidable 14:12
26th 9:2	activity 6:5	and/or 10:12	<hr/> B <hr/>
<hr/> 3 <hr/>	actual 20:5	appears 17:25	background 4:7 9:9 14:15
3,500 17:10	added 21:6	appendices 21:11	based 19:20
30th 8:18	addition 10:22	appendix 17:21	basin 6:24
<hr/> 4 <hr/>	additional 13:17 15:23		begin 4:21
4(e) 12:11 13:2 19:3	Additionally 10:19		beginning 13:17
4(e)'s 13:4	additions 10:12		beneficial 6:1,15, 22
			Big 16:15

<p>biological 13:24 14:13</p> <p>Bishop 3:25</p> <p>bit 10:24 15:12 20:14,21 21:23</p> <p>BLM 16:10</p> <p>BLM's 12:11 13:2</p> <p>BLM/DOI 13:3</p> <p>board 3:11,18 4:8 5:7,21 6:7,8 7:2, 11,16,21,23 8:3, 6,7,10,17,19 9:3, 5,10 11:18,20 14:21,23 17:15 18:2 19:22 20:2,9</p> <p>board's 4:17 7:7 8:14 9:7 21:5</p> <p>border 9:15</p> <p>bottom 5:9</p> <p>boundary 10:1, 11,13</p> <p>briefly 4:9</p> <p>Bureau 10:2 19:2</p> <p>bypass 16:16</p> <p>bypassing 18:22</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">C</p> <hr/> <p>California 3:10 4:10 5:23 7:13,16 10:3 16:11,15,25</p> <p>California's 5:24 16:19</p> <p>call 22:3</p> <p>called 7:24 10:21 15:5</p>	<p>calls 14:7</p> <p>capacity 9:20,22 17:9</p> <p>carried 20:1</p> <p>case 6:24 7:23 8:18,20</p> <p>cavitation 18:17</p> <p>Central 6:24 7:1</p> <p>CEQA 7:14,15,22, 24,25 8:4,6,9,12, 15 9:11 11:19 13:23 14:17,20</p> <p>certification 3:11 4:14 6:7,12,16 7:6,10,12 8:1,4 9:7</p> <p>certifications 4:9 6:9,14,20 7:3 9:10</p> <p>CFS 17:3,10,11</p> <p>challenged 19:7</p> <p>changed 19:16</p> <p>chart 8:13</p> <p>Chase 3:19 4:7 5:14,15,17 20:11, 17,20 22:2</p> <p>Chon 3:22</p> <p>claim 17:5,7</p> <p>Clean 6:3</p> <p>clear 17:1 20:8</p> <p>closed 14:19 19:10</p> <p>combined 9:20</p> <p>comment 5:12 8:23 9:1 14:19 15:2,4 20:14,22</p>	<p>21:25</p> <p>comments 4:18 5:12 14:21 21:15, 17,22 22:7</p> <p>Commission 6:18</p> <p>communications 18:1,3 20:4</p> <p>complete 20:1</p> <p>completed 14:23</p> <p>completing 8:4 16:21</p> <p>compliance 7:6</p> <p>complicated 17:14</p> <p>comply 6:21 7:13</p> <p>component 12:13,18</p> <p>components 12:8,17,22 16:14, 18</p> <p>comprised 12:8</p> <p>concludes 9:2 17:22</p> <p>conclusion 15:21 18:11</p> <p>condition 12:11</p> <p>conditions 6:8,16 13:3 19:3,5,9,14</p> <p>conducts 8:19</p> <p>consensus 16:8</p> <p>constrain 18:24</p> <p>constraint 18:15</p> <p>constraints 18:13,20</p>	<p>construct 10:7</p> <p>construction 10:19 11:8,9 14:5</p> <p>consultation 8:7</p> <p>context 11:23 19:18</p> <p>continue 10:9</p> <p>continued 11:24</p> <p>continues 17:5</p> <p>control 3:11 6:23, 25 7:2,4</p> <p>copies 21:9</p> <p>copy 21:10</p> <p>counties 9:16</p> <p>couple 10:10</p> <p>court 5:3</p> <p>Cove 9:24</p> <p>cover 7:14 11:5</p> <p>covers 10:6</p> <p>Creek 16:15</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">D</p> <hr/> <p>Dam 9:18 17:1</p> <p>data 17:16,17 18:9 19:20 20:3</p> <p>Dave 15:18,20,25 16:1 20:11,23 22:5</p> <p>Day 10:22 12:2</p> <p>days 8:23</p> <p>decades 16:17</p> <p>decision 9:7</p> <p>deemed 8:16</p>
--	--	--	---

deeper 10:24	dredge 7:7	evidence 17:8	flexibility 20:6
deficiency 17:20	driven 18:12	excluded 19:13	floor 4:18
Department 16:11	due 17:6	existing 11:24 16:21	flow 8:13 12:7,15, 17,22 13:5,8,9, 10,13 14:4 17:1, 23 19:5
description 11:15	duration 4:23	exists 18:9	flows 16:15,17 17:2 18:7,12
detailed 11:11	<hr/> E <hr/>	explanations 17:12	fluctuations 17:11
determination 8:9 19:20	Edison's 16:15, 20	extending 13:15	focus 6:14 12:5 16:5
determined 8:11	effects 7:19	extreme 17:2	folks 3:17
developed 16:17	EIR 7:25 8:23 9:2, 6,8 11:16,19 12:5 13:21 14:18,22, 24 16:6 17:19,21 18:23 21:9,10 22:7	eye 21:4	foot 12:19 16:23
development 10:21 12:1	EIR's 21:11	<hr/> F <hr/>	Forest 10:1 16:11
dictate 15:16	email 21:17	facilities 10:14,16	formulating 20:15
dig 5:20	end 5:10,13 12:14 13:8	fact 17:18	forward 20:1 21:1
discharged 6:5	Energy 6:17	fatality 17:4	foundation 18:9
disclosed 18:3	engineering 18:19	feature 15:3,16	framework 16:22
disclosure 20:3	enhance 5:23	features 9:17	Fresno 9:15
discuss 4:15 13:19 14:25	ensure 6:9,20 7:3,7 19:24	federal 6:4,13,17 16:9	full 15:25 20:3
discussing 4:4	enunciate 5:5	feet 9:22	fully 12:13
discussion 11:11	environmental 3:9,15,19,22 4:10 5:17 7:13,19,24 8:11,15,22 10:23 11:1 12:1 18:20, 24	FERC 6:19 10:8, 13 11:14 12:12	future 21:1,2
dive 9:11 10:24	equivalent 13:7	fill 7:7	<hr/> G <hr/>
Division 5:18	establish 15:10	final 9:6,8 11:13 14:22,24 21:13 22:7	Garrett 3:21
docket 11:14	evaluated 18:4	finally 4:17 19:1	gate 17:16
document 7:22, 24,25 8:9,12 21:7		finding 19:9	gates 9:18
documented 5:3		Fisch 3:7,9 15:19 22:9	gauge 10:20 11:10
door 19:11		Fish 16:10,12	generally 8:2
downstream 17:10		fixed 18:20	generation 18:16, 22
draft 3:15 8:21,23 9:2 11:15,19 12:4 13:21 14:18 16:6 17:21 21:9,10		flawed 19:21	

<p>geology 13:25</p> <p>give 4:3 15:22 20:14 21:24</p> <p>great 15:6 21:3</p> <p>ground 4:22</p> <p>grounded 20:5</p> <p>guys 22:8</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">H</p> <hr/> <p>hand 5:13 15:3,16</p> <p>handle 15:1</p> <p>hazardous 13:25</p> <p>hazards 13:25</p> <p>hearing 19:8</p> <p>held 8:20</p> <p>high-level 8:14 11:3</p> <p>hop 4:2</p> <p>hopping 22:4</p> <p>hour 12:19 16:1, 23</p> <p>hourly 17:15</p> <p>houses 9:18</p> <p>hydroelectric 3:16 4:13 5:19 6:8 9:12,13 21:1, 5</p> <p>hydrograph 16:18</p> <p>hydrology 14:1, 14 18:6 20:6</p> <p>hydropower 16:2, 25</p>	<hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">I</p> <hr/> <p>idea 15:11</p> <p>identified 13:20, 23</p> <p>identifying 11:21</p> <p>immediately 17:18</p> <p>impact 3:15 7:24 8:11,15,22 14:7, 12</p> <p>impacts 7:20 13:20,21 14:6,10</p> <p>implementation 11:25 12:10,18 13:2</p> <p>implemented 18:8</p> <p>important 19:1, 18,22,23</p> <p>include 9:17 10:12 13:17 14:13 22:7</p> <p>included 5:8 18:1 19:6</p> <p>includes 10:1,11 13:8,24 21:8</p> <p>including 7:8 10:14 11:21 16:9</p> <p>inclusion 20:4</p> <p>increased 17:2</p> <p>independently 18:4</p> <p>inefficient 18:18</p> <p>infeasible 19:10</p>	<p>inflow 10:20 11:10</p> <p>inform 8:1</p> <p>informal 8:7</p> <p>information 20:7</p> <p>informed 4:16 9:8 20:25 21:4</p> <p>informs 7:15</p> <p>input 4:11 9:4 15:1 20:12,23 22:5</p> <p>install 9:20</p> <p>intact 19:18</p> <p>intent 19:25</p> <p>interest 3:13</p> <p>interested 7:17</p> <p>interior 19:12</p> <p>introduction 5:16 15:7</p> <p>involved 5:21</p> <p>issue 7:12 8:3 9:5 14:23 17:14</p> <p>issued 6:16 8:7, 18 13:3</p> <p>issues 18:19</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">J</p> <hr/> <p>Joaquin 9:14 16:4</p> <p>July 7:10</p> <p>June 8:21</p> <p>justification 17:25 19:17</p>	<hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">K</p> <hr/> <p>K1 9:19 10:15 11:9 12:2</p> <p>K2 9:19 10:17</p> <p>Karen 3:25</p> <p>Kerckhoff 3:16, 20 4:12 5:19 8:24 9:12,13,17,21 10:9,20 16:16 17:1,13 18:13 20:25 21:2,5,20 22:6</p> <p>Kerckhoff's 6:24</p> <p>key 16:17</p> <p>kind 15:10</p> <p>Kleinschmidt 4:1</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">L</p> <hr/> <p>land 9:24 10:2 19:2</p> <p>large 18:12</p> <p>lastly 5:11</p> <p>law 7:5</p> <p>lead 7:21 11:19</p> <p>leads 7:15</p> <p>leave 10:17 20:14</p> <p>led 19:10</p> <p>Lenahan 3:21</p> <p>level 9:18</p> <p>license 6:4,13,18 10:8 11:13</p> <p>life 11:6</p>
---	---	---	--

limitation 18:16	19:16	modified 13:4,6	operating 18:14, 18
limitations 18:23	means 11:25	modifying 10:15	operation 11:24 14:5
limited 17:7	measure 11:12 12:15,16,17,20, 21,22,23 13:9,10, 11,12,18	move 14:9 20:24 21:13	operational 10:17 18:16,21 20:3,6
limits 15:9	measures 10:23 11:2,4,5 12:1,14 13:5,6,7,14 14:5	moving 21:1	operations 10:9 12:9 17:7,16
link 5:8	mechanical 18:15	mute 4:23	opportunity 19:23
links 21:7	meet 17:6,23 18:12	<hr/> N <hr/>	original 19:9,17, 21,24
located 9:14 21:9	meeting 3:14 4:18,21,23,24 5:2,6 15:2 20:16, 19 22:1	name's 16:1	outrage 12:23 13:10
logistics 4:22	meetings 8:20	Nathan 3:7,9 5:16 15:19 22:9	outcome 19:19
lot 3:17 11:2	melt 16:18	National 16:10	outlets 9:19
low 9:18	mentioned 19:4 21:19	Native 7:16	outline 4:3
LTOR 16:14 17:23 18:7,12	microphone 15:6	natural 16:18 18:15	outlined 6:22
<hr/> M <hr/>	minimize 7:20	negotiated 19:19	overview 4:10,12 8:14 9:11 11:3
Madera 9:15	minimum 8:23 20:2	negotiations 19:11	owned 9:13
mail 21:17	minute 17:16 21:24	NOP 8:17	ownership 9:25
maintain 14:2	minutes 4:7 15:20 17:3	Notably 19:14	ownerships 10:4
Major 9:17	mission 5:23	notice 8:7,10,16 21:8	<hr/> P <hr/>
make 20:7	mitigate 7:20	number 12:11	p.m. 21:15
management 10:2,23 11:1 12:1 13:14	mitigated 13:22 14:10	<hr/> O <hr/>	Pacific 21:15
Management's 19:3	modeling 17:22 18:5	objectives 6:21 19:25	Park 16:10
manager 3:20,24 5:19		observed 17:10	Parker 3:23
mandatory 6:17		obtain 6:6	part 6:17 18:12
March 11:13		officially 12:3	participants 4:19
materials 13:25		open 4:17	parties 7:18
Mccormick 3:19 5:15,17 20:11,17, 20 22:2		operate 10:7	parts 10:13
meaningfully		operated 9:14	

<p>passing 16:14</p> <p>past 16:3 18:7</p> <p>Patterson 3:24</p> <p>pause 20:16,19 22:1</p> <p>people 15:11</p> <p>period 9:1 14:19</p> <p>permanent 18:23</p> <p>permit 6:4</p> <p>person 5:1 15:10, 17</p> <p>PG&E 7:9 9:14 10:1,7,8,22 11:4 12:22 17:5,9,22 18:1,11 19:7,11</p> <p>PG&E's 4:13 6:12 11:12 13:4,13</p> <p>physical 21:18</p> <p>plan 4:6</p> <p>planned 12:23 13:10</p> <p>plans 6:23,24,25 10:24 11:2,4,5,7 14:3</p> <p>plausible 17:12</p> <p>points 17:9</p> <p>policies 7:4</p> <p>portion 5:12</p> <p>posted 5:7 22:6</p> <p>postings 21:2,6</p> <p>potentially 7:18 13:19,21</p> <p>powerhouse 10:15,17 11:9 12:2 17:9 18:13</p>	<p>powerhouses 9:19</p> <p>precedent 18:25</p> <p>preliminary 12:11</p> <p>preparation 8:16</p> <p>prepare 14:22</p> <p>prepared 7:22,23</p> <p>present 4:19</p> <p>presentation 4:3 5:6,10,13</p> <p>preserve 5:23</p> <p>pretty 16:13</p> <p>primarily 13:15</p> <p>prior 15:8</p> <p>private 10:4</p> <p>problems 17:24</p> <p>procedures 7:7</p> <p>process 4:11,17 8:6,15 9:11 14:17,20 19:8</p> <p>program 3:12,24, 25</p> <p>project 3:13,16, 20,21,23 4:13 5:18,19 6:18,21 7:10 8:2,24 9:6, 12,13,17,25 10:6, 8,9,14,18 11:15, 18,21,22,23,24 12:6,9 13:1,8 14:4,7,16 16:16 19:25 21:1,5</p> <p>project's 5:7 7:18</p> <p>projects 6:8 16:20,25</p>	<p>Promise 15:25</p> <p>proposed 6:5 7:10,18 8:2 10:6, 11,14,18,23 11:4, 18 12:6,9,14 13:1,5,7,13 14:3, 7,16</p> <p>proposes 10:7,8 11:12</p> <p>protect 5:25</p> <p>protecting 6:14</p> <p>protection 6:10 7:7 18:25</p> <p>provide 4:7,9,11 11:3 15:4 20:22</p> <p>provided 17:19 21:18</p> <p>public 4:11 5:12 7:17 8:22 9:1,4 14:19 15:1 16:24 19:16,24 21:6</p> <p>publicly 21:11,19</p> <p>publish 21:7</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">Q</p> <hr/> <p>quality 3:11 4:8, 10,14 5:22,24 6:6,9,11,14,15, 16,20,21,23,25 7:1,4,9,12,13 8:1, 3 9:7,10 14:1,13, 14</p> <p>question 17:17</p> <hr/> <p style="text-align: center;">R</p> <hr/> <p>radio 9:18</p>	<p>raise 15:3,15</p> <p>ramp 12:16</p> <p>ramp- 12:21</p> <p>ramp-up 12:19, 20,21 13:11</p> <p>ramping 12:7,9, 17 13:16,18 16:23 19:5</p> <p>ranges 18:18</p> <p>rate 12:19 16:23</p> <p>rationale 19:15</p> <p>reach 16:16</p> <p>Real 18:8</p> <p>realistic 20:6</p> <p>receive 4:18</p> <p>received 9:4</p> <p>receiving 15:1</p> <p>recent 18:6</p> <p>recession 12:7, 15 13:9</p> <p>Reclamation 10:3</p> <p>recommendation 16:8</p> <p>recommendation s 19:21</p> <p>recommended 19:5</p> <p>record 17:17 18:2 20:2,5</p> <p>recorded 5:3</p> <p>recreation 9:23, 24 10:21 11:7</p> <p>reductions 10:12</p> <p>reflects 16:8</p>
---	---	---	--

Regional 6:22,25 7:1	requirement 16:24	revised 13:2,4,14 19:3,15 20:5	senior 3:9
Regulatory 6:18	requirements 7:5 17:6,23 19:17	revisions 19:19	September 12:12
related 6:12 13:11 14:4,5 18:17 21:2	requires 6:3 20:1	revolve 13:15	series 19:10
release 3:15 12:15 13:9	reservoir 9:21 10:20 17:13,16	rights 5:18,22	Service 10:1 16:10,11
released 8:17,22, 24 14:18	resolve 17:15,17	risk 17:4	sets 18:25
releases 17:12	resource 13:23 14:3,8,11,12 16:9 19:4	River 9:15	shortening 13:15
reliably 17:22	resources 3:10 5:25 11:5 13:24 14:13	roads 11:6	show 5:9
relicensing 3:17 4:13	respect 4:24	role 19:23	shown 11:3
relicensings 16:4	respectful 15:9	room 3:17	significant 7:19 13:20,21,22 14:9, 12 17:20
relied 20:4	respond 9:4 14:21	rough 18:14	simply 16:21
rely 17:25 18:6	response 3:14	roughly 17:3	slide 4:5,20 7:14 8:13 10:25 13:1 21:14,18
relying 18:2	responses 22:7	routinely 17:10	slides 11:4 21:11, 19
remain 4:23	responsible 8:8 11:20	ROZS 18:14	slow 5:4
remains 17:4 19:18	restoration 16:21	rules 4:22	Smalley 9:24
reminder 5:2	restore 5:24 16:17	rundown 4:3	snow 16:18
removal 13:11	result 6:5 14:6,11 19:8	<hr/> S <hr/>	soils 13:25
replace 12:9,13, 21 13:6	resulting 17:3	safety 16:24 19:17,24	Southern 16:15, 19
replacement 14:4	retired 12:3	San 9:14 16:4	speak 5:1,4 15:12,15,21
Report 3:16 7:25 8:11,15,22	retirement 10:15 11:8	save 5:11	speakers 4:24
reporter 5:3	retiring 10:16	science 19:24	speakers' 4:25
request 15:2	review 9:3 10:5 11:15 14:21	scientific 19:9,16	speaking 8:2 15:8
require 7:6 17:15 20:3	reviewed 16:13	scientist 3:10,20, 22 5:17	specialist 16:2
required 6:6 16:19 17:19		scoping 8:20	specifically 19:2
		season 12:17,22 13:10	spill 12:7,14,16, 17,22 13:8,10
		section 6:2	sprinkled 10:4
		seeking 6:4	
		send 21:16	

staff 11:19	supporting 16:7	unavoidable 14:9	16,21,23 8:1,3,5, 6,10,14,17,19 9:3,5,6,7,10 11:18,20 14:1,14, 21,23 19:22 21:4
stakeholders 16:9 19:12	surface 6:5	unclear 18:5	
standard 16:24 21:16	<hr/> T <hr/>	underlying 19:15	
start 15:7,17,20	talk 11:17	understand 19:1	
started 3:8	terrestrial 11:6 14:14	units 18:16	waters 6:10 7:8
state 3:10,18 4:8, 16 5:7,20,21 6:7 7:5,8,11,16,21,23 8:2,5,6,10,14,17, 19 9:3,5,6,10 10:3 11:18,20 14:20,23 16:8 19:22 21:4	Thaler 3:23	unmute 15:6,23	watershed 16:4
state's 6:10	thoughts 20:15	updates 10:11,14	Waverly 3:24
stated 12:25	time 5:1 13:16 15:9,10,12,17,23 20:15,21 21:16 22:8	upgrades 18:21	ways 7:19
stay 4:16 20:25 21:4	today 3:18 4:4,6, 19 5:4 6:2 17:4 22:8	upstream 16:20 17:6,8 18:8	webpage 21:5,20
Steindorf 15:25 16:1	top 12:25	usable 9:21	website 5:7 21:12
step 13:16,17 14:20	trails 11:6	<hr/> V <hr/>	weeks 5:8
steps 14:17	transcript 5:6	Valley 6:25 7:1	wetlands 7:8
stick 21:22	transparent 20:2	verbal 4:18	whitewater 12:15 13:9 16:2,12
storage 17:7,13, 16	treats 18:23	verbally 15:4	Wildlife 16:10,12
straightforward 16:14	trial 19:7	versions 13:4	Wilhelmina 3:22
submitted 12:12	tribes 7:17	vibration 18:17	worked 16:3
subsequent 12:16	troubling 18:25	video 5:2	world 18:8
superior 20:8	trustee 8:8	viewpoints 4:25	written 21:15
supplement 11:13	turbine 18:21	virtual 4:22 21:10	<hr/> Y <hr/>
supported 17:8	Turning 17:21	Vista 10:22 12:2	years 16:3 18:7
	type 7:23 19:7	<hr/> W <hr/>	<hr/> Z <hr/>
	typically 18:17	wait 15:5	zones 18:14
	<hr/> U <hr/>	walk 4:12	
	U.S. 10:1 16:10, 11	wanting 20:22	
		water 3:10,11,18 4:8,14,16 5:7,18, 20,21,22,24,25 6:3,6,7,8,9,11,13, 14,15,20,21,23, 25 7:1,4,9,11,12,	