



LAKE PILLSBURY ALLIANCE

VIA FERC on-line and USPS to address below

July 23, 2026

Debbie-Ann A. Reese, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street NE, Room 1A
Washington, DC 20426

Subject: Scoping Comments under the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) for
the Potential Surrender and Decommissioning of Potter Valley Hydroelectric
Project No. P-77-332

Dear Federal Energy Regulatory Commission:

The **Lake Pillsbury Alliance** appreciates the opportunity to submit comments during the NEPA scoping process for Pacific Gas and Electric Company’s (“PG&E” or “Applicant”) proposed surrender and decommissioning of the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project (FERC Project No. 77) (“Project”).

The Lake Pillsbury Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of Lake Pillsbury for public benefit. Our members are recreational users, property owners, lease holders, ranchers, and business operators. As community stakeholders in the Lake Pillsbury area, we are dedicated to protecting the people and ecosystems in our region.

We ask the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (“FERC” or “Commission”) to ensure that its Environmental Assessment (“EA”) is based on an accurate assessment of the environmental impacts of the Project and feasible mitigation measures, rather than relying on PG&E’s Final Surrender Application, which does not adequately address the Project’s environmental impacts. Given the Project’s potential to profoundly affect Lake Pillsbury, the Eel River, and the interconnected Russian River watershed, the Commission should require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”) providing a comprehensive, science-based, and transparent analysis of all reasonably foreseeable environmental impacts of all activities related to the decommissioning of Scott Dam. NEPA requires FERC to prepare an EIS before undertaking a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(C). The analysis should consider all significant impacts of the Project, whenever and wherever they may occur, rather than limiting the analysis to the small area

addressed by the Final Surrender Application. The EA and EIS must evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives, including the No Action Alternative and the alternatives described below.

In light of the significance of the Project and its wide-ranging, permanent regional impacts, we also ask FERC to prepare a “Scoping Document 2” that addresses comments on Scoping Document 1.

1. PG&E’s Final Surrender Application Does Not Accurately Describe Existing Conditions or Adequately Address the Environmental Impacts of the Project.

The Lake Pillsbury Alliance’s comments on the Draft Surrender Application corrected inaccurate information on local property ownership and activities in the Lake Pillsbury area. The Final Surrender Application (“Application”) did not cure these inaccuracies. We are very concerned that the failure to incorporate the information that we provided represents an intent to mischaracterize the size and character of the Lake Pillsbury basin communities and businesses to fit a narrative that adverse impacts are inconsequential.

We ask the Commission to incorporate the following corrections and information:

- Map 2.2.3.9-2 in the Application, displaying the Lake Pillsbury Reservoir Recreation Facilities, omits the largest residential subdivision in the Lake Pillsbury basin, Lake Pillsbury Ranch. With 225 lots and approximately 165 homes, Lake Pillsbury Ranch is located on private lands at the North end of Lake Pillsbury in close proximity to the Project boundary. Map 2.2.3.9-2 also does not include private boat docks that are owned by the Lake Pillsbury Homesite Association and Lake Pillsbury Resort.
- Table 2.2.3.9-2 summarizing information on Non-Project recreation facilities in the vicinity of the Project, incorrectly describes the Lake Pillsbury Homesite Tract as an “Association.” The Lake Pillsbury Homesite Tract was established in the 1940s and includes 71 privately owned cabins located on United State Forest Service (“USFS”) lands. Residents have long-term special use permits issued by the USFS.
- The privately owned Rice Fork residences are used year-round, but the wording in Table 2.2.3.9-2 implies that these are merely summer vacation homes.
- Table 2.2.3.9-2 also omits the Lake Pillsbury Ranch (225 lots, about 165 homes), which is located on private lands at the North end of Lake Pillsbury in close proximity to the Project boundary.

The discussion of land ownership also must describe and clarify the transfer of Project lands to the Mendocino Land Trust (Conservation Easement). The Conservation Easement purportedly covers certain currently inundated and other Project area lands. The Applicant and Mendocino Land Trust have not been clear as to what alternative facilities could be developed and how the conservation easement will interplay with restoration, construction of new roads and recreational facilities, and implementation of mitigation plans within the Lake Pillsbury basin. As noted below, in Section 4, any effects of the Conservation Easement on the analysis of impacts and mitigation measures should be clearly identified.

More generally, the EA and EIS must be based on accurate baseline conditions for all impact areas, including local economic activity associated with recreation, tourism, and property use at Lake Pillsbury. Recreation, fire protection, and other community services dependent on Lake Pillsbury must also be accurately described and assessed. Baseline data must reflect existing climate trends, water supply conditions, and the fire-risk context in Mendocino and Lake Counties.

The Application further provides an inadequate basis for environmental review because it reaches many unsupported conclusions about the significance of impacts on the environment, as discussed further below in the discussion of environmental impacts and mitigation measures. These conclusions are not supported by evidence and should not be given any deference during the preparation of the EA and EIS.

2. The EIS Must Identify and Thoroughly Evaluate the Project’s Short-Term and Long-Term Environmental Impacts.

2.1 Water Supply and Water Availability

The EA and EIS must analyze all points of water diversions in Project-affected waterbodies and consider how each would be impacted at each stage of dam removal. In particular, this analysis must consider groundwater and emergency water supplies for firefighting. The Application acknowledges that the Applicant has insufficient information to provide an accurate determination of impacts on groundwater in the area surrounding Lake Pillsbury, much less to develop appropriate mitigation measures. The Application states that “[t]he connectivity between groundwater and Lake Pillsbury reservoir is currently unknown” and “assumes” that “lowering the water table could adversely affect at least some wells.”¹ The EA and EIS should be based on facts rather than “assumptions.” This is particularly true when the analysis is expected to have direct effects on public health and safety, for example, on the ability of residents to have access to potable water and reliable water supplies for fire suppression. The Applicant must develop this information through scientifically supportable, transparent studies.

The EA and EIS must also provide accurate, unbiased information on water availability for firefighting. The Application acknowledges that the Project “may result in unavoidable adverse effects to local fire suppression to properties near Lake Pillsbury reservoir and the East Branch Russian River due to the replacement of Lake Pillsbury reservoir and diverted flows from the Eel River to the East Branch Russian River with other sources of water, including the Eel River, as a water source, resulting in potentially longer fire response times.”² “Longer fire suppression times” translate directly into the loss of property and lives. The EA and EIS must evaluate and disclose these impacts. FERC should not just hope that “alternative water strategies can be achieved,” as stated in the Application. This suggestion that alternatives *may* be developed in the future does not eliminate the need for a full, thorough evaluation of fire suppression impacts in the EA and EIS.

¹ Application, p. 2.2.4.7-10.

² Application, p. 2.2.4.9-11.

The Eel River area above Scott Dam dries up seasonably, as shown in the photo below. It does not provide year-round water. The EA and EIS must take into account the fact that Lake Pillsbury provides *year-round* water that is essential for rapid response to fires. It accommodates fixed wing planes and helicopters and fire fighters on the ground. Mitigation measures for Project impacts must provide for the same capabilities.

9/2025 (Normal water year)
Eel River as it enters Lake Pillsbury



Drought (8/2021) Eel River as it enters Lake Pillsbury	Drought (8/2021) Rice Fork Tributary – Split Rock area
	

In addition, the EA and EIS must evaluate:

- Changes in flow regimes in both the Eel River and East Branch Russian River.
- Impacts of reservoir drawdown on downstream sediment transport, turbidity, and nutrient dynamics.
- Potential mobilization of legacy contaminants in reservoir sediments, and
- Effects on water supply reliability for Russian River communities and agricultural users.

2.2 Biological Resources: The Scope and Nature of Restoration

The EA and EIS must describe and document the application's proposed restoration of areas affected by the Project, including revegetation and stabilization of the lakebed of Lake Pillsbury. Based on no evidence whatsoever, the Application concludes that restoration will ensure that the impacts of dewatering Lake Pillsbury will be less than significant. Not even the "conceptual" plan promised by the Draft Surrender Application has been provided. The EA and EIS must include a thorough, scientifically supportable study of restoration, including specifying the vegetation that will be used for restoration, obligations to maintain vegetation, and the timeline for restoration.

Impacts of restoration must also be disclosed. Will restoration further reduce the groundwater available to property owners around Lake Pillsbury? Will it produce noise impacts, require road closures, or create other impacts? None of this information was provided in the Application, and the EA and EIS must fully disclose the plans for and impacts of restoration.

The EA and EIS must also fully evaluate and disclose:

- Effects of dam removal on fish passage, spawning, and habitat conditions, including upstream restoration potential and downstream disruption.
- Impacts to riparian and wetland habitats during reservoir dewatering and post-removal recolonization.

2.3 Transportation

The EA and EIS must clearly identify all access roads that will be removed or altered around Lake Pillsbury, including identification of recreation area access that will be lost. This information is impossible to glean from the Application.

The Application does not ensure that safe public evacuation and emergency access routes will be in place once roads have been removed or altered. Increased fire hazards, combined with the loss of Lake Pillsbury as a water source for firefighters, mandate the full analysis and disclosure of Project effects on emergency access.

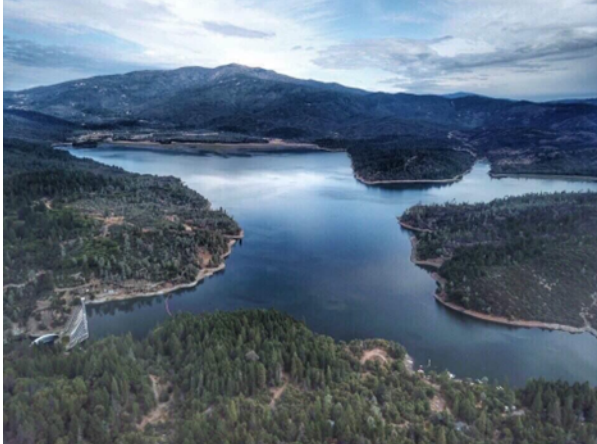
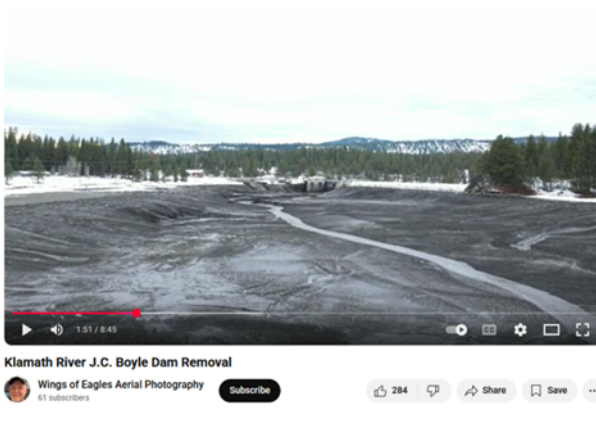
2.4 Aesthetics

The EA and EIS must evaluate visual impacts from the destruction of Lake Pillsbury compared to existing conditions. The Application absurdly asserts that Project would result in a "minor beneficial effect to aesthetic resources."³ It achieves this counterintuitive result by comparing a future, restored river to the "denuded reservoir bed immediately following dam removal."⁴ The Application thereby avoids comparing short-term conditions (the denuded reservoir bed) or long-term conditions (a hoped-for, but not assured, riverine system) to the existing environment of a

³ Application, p. 2.2.4.11-5. In another place, the Application asserts that "[i]mplementation of the Proposed Action would not result in unavoidable adverse effects to aesthetic resources." Application, p. 2.2.4.11-9.

⁴ Application, p. 2.2.4.11-5 (emphasis added).

large lake ringed by trees. The “denuded reservoir” is the *impact, not the baseline* for analyzing aesthetic impacts. Short-term and long-term impacts must be assessed based on existing conditions.

Existing condition: Lake Pillsbury	Impact of dam removal (depicting the removal of the J.C. Boyle dam)
	

2.5 Recreation

The EA and EIS must evaluate the impacts of the destruction of Lake Pillsbury on boating, camping, fishing, and tourism economies at Lake Pillsbury. Development in the area occurred because of Lake Pillsbury. The loss of Lake Pillsbury will forever alter recreational use in the basin, the hub of the Mendocino National Forest. Historically, the heaviest recreational use has been during the summer months between Memorial Day and Labor Day. A transition to river-based recreation will likely end all water-based activities during the hot, dry summer months when rivers and streams throughout the area experience extremely low flows – including some days with zero inflows – causing intermittent skipping between isolated puddles and pools and the complete drying of streambeds in many reaches. The destruction of Lake Pillsbury will substantially reduce visitation to the Mendocino National Forest.

The Application assumes, without evidence, that existing homeowners and businesses will merely transition to “river-based recreation,” and as a result, the Application utterly fails to evaluate impacts on the existing recreational use of Lake Pillsbury. The EA and EIS must include recreation data from the residential tracts (Lake Pillsbury Ranch, Rice Fork, Lake Pillsbury Homesite Tract), individual property owners, Westshore Camp, Mendocino National Forest, and the Lake Pillsbury Resort to develop a full understanding of the recreational and economic importance of lake-based recreation at Lake Pillsbury. The EA and EIS’s evaluation of recreation should encompass impacts on community character, property values, and local recreation-based businesses.

2.6 Landslide and Erosion Risks

The Application makes numerous assertions about landslide risk and seismic stability that are not supported by adequate analysis. The Application notes that “[g]eologic units in the Project

vicinity and along the Bartlett Springs fault are characterized by extensive landslides”⁵ and that “landslides have been mapped immediately upgradient of Scott Dam and downstream of Scott Dam along the Eel River. An active landslide is located upgradient of the abutment adjacent to Scott Dam on the south side of Lake Pillsbury reservoir.”⁶ It further states that “rapid drawdown of water and movement of sediments following removal of the adit plug could result in destabilization of the reservoir shoreline, resulting in collapse of the shoreline or landslides.”⁷

The State Water Board’s comment letter on the Draft Surrender Application emphasized the importance of analyzing landslide potential. One such comment, which does not appear to have been addressed in the Application, states as follows:

Section 3.4.1.7 of the Draft Surrender Application states PG&E’s proposed Scott Dam Slope Stability Monitoring Plan could involve removal of “all or a portion of the landslide material prior to initiating the removal of Scott Dam” and a plan to “Stabilize the landslide with mechanical supports such as caissons.” The Final Surrender Application should clarify the approximate quantity of landslide material that would be removed. Additionally, PG&E should perform a technical analysis of how drawdown will affect groundwater levels and drainage within the landslide area.⁸

We were not able to locate information quantifying the approximate quantity of landslide material that would be removed. Nor did we locate any technical analyses of how drawdown will affect groundwater levels and draining.

The State Water Board comment letter also recommended a commitment to “performing additional geotechnical analysis to determine the seismic stability of the pinnacle adjacent to the historical landslide upstream of Scott Dam and whether it may become unstable following draining of Lake Pillsbury”⁹ as part of the proposed “Scott Dam Slope Stability Monitoring Plan.” No such commitment appears to have been included in the Final Application. Seismic safety and risk during deconstruction activities, particularly at Scott Dam, must be evaluated.

The Application claims that the Scott Dam Slope Stability Monitoring Plan will mitigate the impacts of the potentially unstable existing landslide on the south side of Lake Pillsbury, depending on future “dam safety reviews” to ensure that “the risks associated with reactivation of this landslide” are “negligible.”¹⁰ No such plan exists at present. The EA and EIS should only base conclusions about landslide risk on adequate information. It should also require the applicant to determine how drawdown will affect groundwater levels and drainage within the landslide area.

⁵ Application, p. 2.2.3.6-13.

⁶ Application, p. 2.2.3.6-16.

⁷ Application, 2.2.4.6-75.

⁸ State Water Board Comment Letter, Att. A, p. 17.

⁹ State Water Board Comment Letter, Att. A, p. 9.

¹⁰ Application, pp. 2.2.4.7-3.

The EA and EIS must also thoroughly evaluate sediment release volumes, transport, and depositional impacts on downstream reaches, including potential mobilization of legacy contaminants in reservoir sediments. The stability of slopes and reservoir margins during and after drawdown must be evaluated.

2.7 Socioeconomic Impacts

The EA and EIS must evaluate the socioeconomic impacts on affected communities, including the Lake Pillsbury Basin, Lake County, the East Branch of the Russian River, Potter Valley, Lake Mendocino, and the Russian River to Jenner, including the following:

- Reduced water availability and the lack of recreational opportunities will result in changed land use patterns.
- Reduced property values will affect the types of businesses that can exist in these areas.
- The loss of Lake Pillsbury as a source of water for firefighting will endanger local communities and may discourage businesses and residents from settling in the area due to the danger of wildfires and increased fire insurance rates and potential fire insurance cancellations.

The EA and EIS must evaluate the full range of impacts resulting from the massive changes that the Project would create in the affected watersheds.

2.8 Wildfire Impacts

The Project will have a significant impact on the region's ability to address the increasing hazard of wildfires. Lake Pillsbury is a proven, reliable water resource to combat wildfires in the upper Eel River watershed, Lake County, eastern Mendocino County, the Mendocino National Forest and beyond. The lake supports use of fixed-wing airplanes, helicopters and firefighters on the ground, protecting residents, visitors, recreational facilities, campgrounds, and critical infrastructure on a mix of private and public lands.

The EA and EIS must thoroughly evaluate the Project's impacts on wildfire and emergency response, including all of the following:

- Loss of Lake Pillsbury as a large-volume aerial firefighting water source;
- Minimal flows (sometimes zero inflows) into the Eel River headwaters area during the height of fire season;
- No access roads directly to the Eel River, therefore no water access for firefighters on the ground to fill water trucks or for residents and other recreational users to seek safety;
- Effects on initial attack capability and containment success;
- Effects on local traffic, road conditions, emergency response times and evacuation needs;
- Increased turn-around times if alternative lakes (18 to 30 air miles away) and dip sites must be used;
- Impacts of seasonal diversions on Lake Mendocino water supply – especially critical as Lake Mendocino is referenced in the surrender document as a potential alternative water source for Lake Pillsbury area fire suppression;

- Catastrophic wildfire risk for Lake Pillsbury full and part-time residents, property owners and other recreational users, ranches, campgrounds, small businesses, recreation facilities;
- Regional impacts of reduced water availability for fire suppression within the region, including impacts on communities along the Russian River that are dependent upon Potter Valley Project water diversions to sustain their fire suppression infrastructure;
- Increased wildfire risks associated with climate change, drought, and reduced water availability; and
- Effects on the Mendocino National Forest Wildfire Management Plan.

Currently, Scoping Document 1 treats wildfire only as a subcategory under Land Use, with two brief bullets:

- "Potential fire risk during construction"; and
- "Effects of reservoir loss as a source of water for wildfire suppression."

Potential wildfire impacts are far broader and more significant than these characterizations. The Project's impacts on wildfire risk should be the subject of a focused analysis. Wildfire impacts should also be evaluated within every relevant category, including water resources, transportation, and socioeconomics.

3. The Geographic Scope of the Impact Analysis Should Not Be Limited to Areas Under the Control of the Applicant.

The Application focuses on impacts within the land areas under PG&E's control, ignoring many impacts on residents and recreation users who do not live within a narrow band surrounding Lake Pillsbury. The EA and EIS must evaluate impacts in all affected areas. For example, groundwater impacts and firefighting impacts will not be limited to areas immediately adjacent to the boundaries of the Project.

We appreciate the fact that FERC will analyze the New Eel-Russian Facility ("NERF") in its EA and EIS, thus acknowledging that the impacts of the Project will be regional and not restricted to PG&E's property. This analysis is consistent with the U.S. Supreme Court's reasoning in the recent *Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County* decision. Although the Court held that separate projects did not have to be analyzed in an EIS, it noted that environmental effects fall under NEPA even if they extend outside the Project's geographical territory or may occur later in time. The Court stated as follows:

To be clear, the environmental *effects* of the project at issue may fall within NEPA even if those *effects* might extend outside the geographical territory of the project or might materialize later in time—for example, run-off into a river that flows many miles from

the project and affects fish populations elsewhere, or emissions that travel downwind and predictably pollute other areas.¹¹

Consequently, the EA and EIS must consider local, regional, and statewide impacts beyond the property controlled by the Applicant.

4. The EA and EIS Must Identify and Require the Implementation of All Feasible Mitigation Measures.

The EA and EIS must include enforceable mitigation measures and a detailed description of how mitigation measures will be enforced. Adequate funding must be available to complete all mitigation measures, including long-term ecological restoration.

Mitigation measures must be established, enforced, and monitored for all adverse impacts of the Project, including the following:

- Impacts on groundwater wells
 - Application states that dewatering Lake Pillsbury will adversely affect groundwater users but fails to provide mitigation. It is not sufficient merely to conclude that groundwater impacts will be “unavoidable.” The EA and EIS must identify all feasible mitigation measures, including compensation and the provision of alternative water supplies.
 - Mitigation measures must address long-term impacts. A fund should be established to ensure that affected residents and property owners are compensated in the long run if sufficient reliable alternative water supplies cannot be provided.
- Impacts on water reliability and cost
 - The Application acknowledges that the Project “may affect the quality and quantity of water available, which may affect the reliability and cost of water for economic uses in the socioeconomic Analysis Area.” It fails to provide mitigation measures. The EA and EIS must identify and require all feasible mitigation measures.
 - Mitigation measures must address long-term impacts. A fund should be established to ensure that affected residents and property owners are compensated in the long run if alternative water supplies cannot be provided.
- Impacts on water supplies for firefighting.
 - A comprehensive fire protection plan should be required to assure a year-round water supply in the Lake Pillsbury basin to protect homes, ranches, and businesses. This is especially important to assure fire protection in the late summer and fall months when the Eel and Rice Fork Rivers are prone to drying.
 - To help to offset the loss of Lake Pillsbury, off-river reservoir pump/storage projects and pool should be implemented to provide a significant amount of water year-round for domestic use and for ground and aerial firefighting.

¹¹ *Seven County. Infrastructure Coal. v. Eagle County.*, 605 U.S. 168, 187 145 S. Ct. 1497, 1515, 221 L. Ed. 2d 820, 839 (2025) (emphasis in original).

- Mitigation measures should ensure that the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District has access to water (e.g., hydrants, small reservoir pools, water tank systems) for firefighting and the equipment needed to ensure that it can effectively access the water.
- Impacts on transportation
 - Prior to construction, PG&E should develop the road system that will be needed to ensure that Lake Pillsbury area residents can access their homes.
 - Roads must be fully accessible and well-maintained throughout the demolition and construction phases, with no barriers to residents' access to their properties.
 - Road conditions should be surveyed after construction has been completed. All roads should be fully repaired and restored after dam removal and restoration projects are completed.
 - PG&E should be required to develop and construct a comprehensive post-dam removal road circulation plan for emergency ingress/egress throughout the Lake Pillsbury basin. The plan should include roads that will facilitate river access and access to alternative water supply sources for firefighting (e.g., hydrants, small reservoir pools, water tank systems).
- Impacts on communication infrastructure
 - The Applicant should be required to develop and implement a Rural Communication Infrastructure Plan to help mitigate adverse impacts on the community from the Project's impacts on fire suppression and from barriers to emergency access.
 - All damage to phone lines from road construction and the dewatering of Lake Pillsbury should be repaired.
 - The plan should ensure that Lake Pillsbury basin communities and businesses can report fire and medical emergencies through improved landline infrastructure or the introduction of cell service.
 - An early warning system should be implemented to ensure that Mendocino National Forest visitors can receive fire alerts.
- Impacts on recreation
 - Implement a public process to identify appropriate recreational opportunities, including campsites, boat ramps, hiking trails, and other facilities that will provide for the highest and best use of resources.
 - Public access to waterbodies must be provided.
- Biological impacts
 - PG&E should be required to develop a vegetation restoration plan with clear criteria for success, monitored for a sufficient period of time to ensure that restoration is successful.
 - Guaranteed funding should be required for biological restoration over a sufficient period of time to ensure that restoration is successful according to identified criteria.

The EA and EIS should also include **adaptive management provisions** to address unforeseen effects, such as unanticipated sediment loads or water supply losses.

The discussion of impacts and mitigation measures must clearly identify the impacts of, and any mitigation that relies on, the transfer of Project lands to the Mendocino Land Trust (Conservation Easement). The Conservation Easement purportedly covers certain currently inundated and other Project area lands. The Applicant and Mendocino Land Trust have not been clear as to what alternative facilities could be developed and how the conservation easement will interplay with restoration, construction of new roads and recreational facilities, and implementation of mitigation plans within the Lake Pillsbury basin. The EA and EIS must clearly identify any influence of the Conservation Easement on the analysis of impacts and proposed mitigation measures.

5. The EIS Must Evaluate a Reasonable Range of Alternatives that Could Reduce Environmental Impacts, Including the No Action Alternative.

An EIS must “study, develop, and describe appropriate alternatives” to the proposed agency action,¹² to inform policymakers and the public of options that would avoid or minimize adverse effects on the environment. While, under the “rule of reason,” the agency “need not consider an infinite range of alternatives, only reasonable or feasible ones,”¹³ it must consider alternatives “varied enough to allow for a real, informed choice.”¹⁴

The discussion of alternatives in the EA and EIS is particularly important because very little work has been done to ensure that the Project is the most beneficial, least-damaging alternative for the future of the Scott Dam. No comprehensive studies have been done to understand all of the alternatives to dam removal and no studies been done to identify alternative fish mitigation enhancements that could be implemented in lieu of removing Scott Dam.

The No-Action Alternative is particularly important because the Potter Valley Project provides substantial public benefits that extend beyond hydroelectric generation, including:

- Wildfire suppression
- Water storage
- Regional water-supply benefits for agriculture and domestic and municipal use
- Drought resilience
- Groundwater support
- Public safety
- Recreation
- Local economic benefits

A comprehensive No Action analysis could demonstrate that the benefits of retaining Lake Pillsbury far outweigh adverse impacts. Without this analysis, decision makers and potential future operators will be deprived of information necessary to determine whether continued operation, modernization, or transfer of the project would better serve the public interest. For this

¹² 42 U.S.C. § 4332(2)(H).

¹³ *Westlands Water Dist. v. U.S. Dep't of Interior*, 376 F.3d 853, 868 (9th Cir. 2004) (quotations and citation omitted).

¹⁴ *Friends of Yosemite Valley v. Kempthorne*, 520 F.3d 1024, 1039 (9th Cir. 2008).

reason, the No Action Alternative should remain as a detailed study throughout preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement.

The absence of research on feasible alternatives puts the community in an impossible situation when proposing alternatives that would be less harmful to the communities and watersheds that will be irreparably harmed by the Project. Based on our review of the alternative water supply scenarios put forth in the SLR International Consultant Impact Analysis report (pp. 13-42, and Table 5 Scenario Comparative Matrix) attached to the [County of Lake Protest and Motion to Intervene](#) filed with FERC on August 25, 2025, we request that the EA and EIS evaluate at least the following three alternatives. Note that the No Action alternative would avoid the impacts on water storage that will result from the three alternatives described below.

5.1 SLR Scenario B - Maintain the Current Operations of Scott Dam and Retrofit the Dam with a Fish Ladder.

This is the highest ranked scenario by SLR, and although their initial evaluation found it infeasible based on their initial evaluation, they have indicated that further analysis of Scenario C might result in a revision of that conclusion.

5.2 SLR Scenario C - Lowered Scott Dam with Fish Ladder

This alternative would provide volitional fish passage without completely removing the dam. It would decrease the water storage by 40%. It may provide the most water for community fire protection, but there is concern that the use of “super Scoopers” for rapid response fire suppression may not be possible in the height of fire season due to the seasonal drying out of the rivers and streams in the area above Scott Dam, and multiple year droughts.

However, it must be understood that PG&E’s 2023 decision to reduce water storage by 25% has already negatively impacted Lake Pillsbury communities, businesses and other forest visitors. The lower lake level has shortened the lake-based recreational season by rendering some boat ramps, marinas and docks unusable by mid-July. The reduced groundwater has impacted some wells and developed springs in the Homesite and the Rice Fork areas. The water quality of Lake Pillsbury has diminished as higher water temperatures have led to growth of invasive weeds and algae.

If greater water storage within a smaller lake footprint can be achieved by dredging, it could preserve existing recreational facilities and campgrounds that would otherwise be pulled during the decommissioning process, preserve the private Westshore campground, and enable communities to relocate lake-based infrastructure for continued recreational use.

This scenario requires local, state or federal take-over; NMFS involvement in water releases could diminish water supply when it is needed most for fire suppression in the Lake Pillsbury area.

This scenario, in conjunction with the proposed New Eel-Russian Facility (NERF), could achieve volitional fish passage at Scott Dam and support the Eel-Russian Project Authority's goals to continue water diversions into the Russian River.

5.3 SLR Scenario D - Reduced Reservoir within Salmon Creek as Main Tributary

This alternative reduces water storage to approximately 30% of current capacity. The maximum capacity would be approximately 9,990 acre feet, but dredging could potentially increase this. The alternative involves full decommissioning and removal of Scott Dam and the addition of a new 3,100 foot long earthen impoundment dam in the Salmon/Smokehouse and Squaw Valley Creeks watershed area to maintain a smaller reservoir. Salmon Creek, Smokehouse Creek and Habematolel Creek would be the primary tributaries flowing into the reduced reservoir.

Under this scenario there is concern that the use of "super scoopers" for rapid response fire suppression will not be possible in the height of fire season due to the seasonal drying out of the rivers and streams in the area above Scott Dam, and multiple year droughts. A mechanism to recharge the reservoir from the Eel River during appropriate flows would be necessary to maximize fire suppression capabilities.

The proposed water reservoir would be in close proximity to the majority of existing recreational facilities, including the various public campgrounds, the Westshore private campground, and the Homesite Tract area. It may provide limited groundwater recharge, which could be beneficial for resident wells and developed springs on the East side of the lake in the Homesite Tract.

5.4 Additional Considerations: SLR Scenario E

SLR Scenario E - Dam Removal with Off-Channel Pond Restoration - might be a good complement to Scenario C and D but should not be a stand-alone alternative because it provides limited fire suppression capabilities. It would involve the development of two potential pond locations, to be based on drainage and assumed floodplain, adjacent to the watercourse. This would maximize function and water supply. Pond A would be located near the confluence of the Eel River and the Salmon and Habematolel Creeks with an approximate footprint area of 57.5 acres. Pond B would be further upstream the Eel River with an approximate footprint area of 41.4 acres.

6. Evidence of Significant Environmental Impacts Requires FERC to Prepare an EIS, Not Merely an EA, for the Project.

Based on the required analysis of "both short- and long-term effects; both beneficial and adverse effects; effects on public health and safety; economic effects; and effects on the quality of life of

the American people,”¹⁵ the Project will have reasonably foreseeable significant effects on the quality of the human environment. Consequently, an EIS must be prepared.¹⁶ .

7. FERC Should Incorporate Meaningful Public Engagement Into its NEPA Process.

The Lake Pillsbury Alliance requests that the Commission ensure meaningful public engagement throughout the NEPA process. All technical studies, modeling assumptions, and draft sections should be made publicly available, with adequate time for review by stakeholders and local governments. The public process should involve all affected stakeholders, including representatives from the Lake Pillsbury Alliance, the Lake Pillsbury Fire Protection District and the County of Lake, in the development of measures to mitigate project impacts.

Conclusion

The proposed surrender and decommissioning of the Potter Valley Project would result in one of the most significant watershed transformations in Northern California and the loss of critical surface water storage that provides myriad benefits at a time when water resource planners and engineers are desperate to increase storage due to climate change. The EA and EIS must therefore provide a rigorous, transparent evaluation of all physical, biological, cultural, and socioeconomic consequences, supported by comprehensive modeling and consultation.

The Lake Pillsbury Alliance appreciates the Commission’s commitment to a thorough, science-based NEPA process and respectfully requests that the issues outlined above be incorporated into the EA and EIS on the Project.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



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¹⁵ U.S. Department of Energy National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures (June 16, 2026) pp. 14-15.

¹⁶ 42 U.S.C. § 4336(b)(1), U.S. Department of Energy National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Implementing Procedures (June 16, 2026), p. 9; FERC Staff Guidance Manual on Implementation of the National Environmental Policy Act (2025), p. 10

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that on this 23rd day of July, 2026, I served a copy of the foregoing document via email, or via United States Postal Service if no email address was available, upon each person designated on the official service list compiled by the Office of the Secretary in this proceeding as attached hereto.

Dated: July 23, 2026

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