



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

July 24, 2026

Submitted via FERC Online

RE: Comments of Russian Riverkeeper on Scoping Document 1 for the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project Surrender and Decommissioning, Project No. P-77-332

Dear Secretary Reese:

On behalf of Russian Riverkeeper (“RRK”), I welcome the opportunity to submit these comments on the May 22, 2026, “Notice of Scoping Meetings and Request for Comments on Proposed Surrender, Decommissioning, and Non-Project Use of Project Lands (“NPUPL”).” Russian Riverkeeper is a local nonprofit that has been successfully protecting the Russian River watershed since 1993. Our mission is to protect and restore our watershed environment for the benefit of current and future generations. To achieve this, we actively pursue the protection and restoration of our watershed, including its mainstem and tributaries, and our groundwaters through scientifically based advocacy, public outreach, and direct engagement with the Russian River community. For these reasons, we submit the following comments.

For more than a decade, RRK has actively participated in discussions regarding the Potter Valley Project (“PVP” or the “Project”) and the development of the Two-Basin Solution. Throughout the formal processes, we have also filed a Motion to Intervene and submitted comments supporting PG&E’s License Surrender Application, dam removal, and the NPUPL proposal needed to allow construction of the New Eel-Russian Facility (“NERF”). Together, these actions offer a once-in-a-century opportunity to restore fish passage and ecological function in the Eel River while allowing both watersheds to transition toward a more resilient and sustainable future that is less susceptible to droughts and changing climate extremes. As such, RRK asks FERC to prepare a focused and thorough NEPA document that evaluates the effects of the proposed action and reasonable alternatives without delaying the transition through analysis of matters that are not reasonably attributable to the federal action.

The Upper Russian River watershed is already confronting declining and increasingly variable Potter Valley Project diversions caused by aging infrastructure, equipment failure, seismic-related storage restrictions, and changing hydrologic conditions in the Eel River. Further delay will not preserve a reliable status quo; it will prolong uncertainty and impede the investments, operating decisions, and conservation measures needed to prepare the Russian River watershed for a changing climate. Moving forward with the Two-Basin Solution and NERF will provide a defined path toward more predictable, seasonally appropriate diversions, allowing Russian River communities to plan responsibly for storage, groundwater recharge, water-use efficiency, and long-term watershed resilience. We cannot afford to remain in indefinite limbo while existing infrastructure continues to fail and water supplies become less reliable.

Moving forward now also allows dam removal and NERF construction to be coordinated as part of a timely regional transition. Dam removal will restore fish passage and ecological processes in



the Eel River, while NERF will provide a modern pathway for diverting water during periods when Eel River flows can support it, reducing reliance on inconsistent and unreliable summer diversions and failing infrastructure. Delay would prolong ecological harm, increase operational uncertainty, and risk disrupting the coordinated approach developed through years of regional negotiations. The practical path forward is therefore to complete environmental review without unnecessary delay and proceed with dam removal and implementation of NERF.

1. The Two-Basin Solution Reflects Years of Broad Regional Collaboration

The Two-Basin Solution emerged from years of collaboration among Tribes, counties, water suppliers, irrigation interests, conservation and fisheries organizations, and state and federal agencies from both the Eel and Russian River watersheds seeking to balance ecological restoration with domestic, agricultural, and industrial water-supply needs in response to PG&E surrendering its license to operate the PVP for economic reasons.¹ PG&E, local agencies and governments, and participating organizations have devoted substantial financial and technical resources to evaluating those alternatives, and that work has consistently demonstrated that retaining and rehabilitating the existing dams for continued operation—including retrofitting them to provide effective fish passage—would not offer an economically or technically feasible long-term solution. These efforts ultimately culminated in the formation of the Eel-Russian Project Authority and the development of the NERF design.² Out of all the alternatives considered, NERF was identified as the most feasible and best route to restore fish passage in the Eel River while maintaining reliable water supplies for Russian River communities. Therefore, RRK strongly supports the Two-Basin Solution as the best way forward, which pairs dam removal to restore fish passage and ecological processes in the Eel River with NERF as a modern facility for continuing seasonally appropriate diversions to the Russian River.

Claims that local communities have not been represented throughout development of the Two-Basin Solution are inconsistent with the record. For example, the Potter Valley Irrigation District (“PVID”)—a member of the Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission

¹ Participants included, but were not limited to Congressman Jared Huffman’s Office; Bear River Rancheria; California Department of Fish and Wildlife; California Trout; City of Ukiah; Coyote Valley Band of Pomo Indians; Dry Creek Rancheria; Friends of the Eel River; Humboldt County; Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission; Lake County; Mendocino County; National Marine Fisheries Service; North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board; Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations; Pacific Gas and Electric Company; Potter Valley Irrigation District; Round Valley Indian Tribes; Russian Riverkeeper; Sonoma County; Sonoma Water; State Water Resources Control Board; The Nature Conservancy; Trout Unlimited; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; U.S. Forest Service; and the Wiyot Tribe. This list also includes all the members, constituents, and stakeholders that make up each of the identified groups.

<https://pottervalleyproject.org/overview/>

² The July 2025 agreement includes ERPA and its members, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Trout, County of Humboldt, Mendocino County Inland Water and Power Commission, Round Valley Indian Tribes, County of Sonoma, Sonoma County Water Agency, and Trout Unlimited. That is strong evidence that the framework includes governmental, Tribal, water-supply, fisheries, and conservation interests.

<https://www.eelrussianauthority.org/reports>

(“IWPC”)—provides irrigation water to approximately 390 farmers across more than 6,900 acres in Potter Valley.³ IWPC members also include the County of Mendocino, the City of Ukiah, Redwood Valley County Water District, and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District, all of which represent Russian River communities and water users that will be most affected by the proposed Project.⁴ Likewise, Sonoma Water serves as the wholesale water supplier to nine cities and water districts that collectively provide drinking water to more than 600,000 residents in Sonoma and Marin counties.⁵ As parties to the Water Diversion Agreement establishing the framework for the Two-Basin Solution, these entities have had a significant voice in negotiating and shaping the proposed path forward. While stakeholders and individual agency members may disagree on particular outcomes, it is inaccurate to suggest that the process has excluded local voices or failed to reflect the interests of the communities most directly affected by the Project. RRK itself is not a party to the agreement, but we feel our input was included in its development and we believe the parties that negotiated it carefully considered broader community interests.

The current proposal emerged from years of discussions across multiple stakeholder groups and a wide breadth of represented interests, all with the joint focus of helping restore the Eel River salmon fisheries while allowing a continued diversion to the Russian River. As such, FERC should consider the full administrative record of this collaboration and should not treat disagreement over particular outcomes as evidence that affected communities were categorically excluded. RRK also supports continued meaningful Tribal consultation and public participation as the design, permitting, mitigation, and restoration plans are developed.

2. Russian Riverkeeper Supports FERC’s Proposed Scope of Environmental Review

RRK appreciates FERC’s thoughtful approach in identifying the appropriate scope of environmental review for the Potter Valley Project License Surrender and Decommissioning proceeding. At this stage of the NEPA process, FERC’s focus should remain on evaluating the reasonably foreseeable environmental consequences of surrendering and decommissioning the Potter Valley Project and the proposed alternatives identified in the May 22, 2026, Notice of Scoping. A focused review will produce a more meaningful environmental analysis while avoiding unnecessary evaluation of issues that fall outside FERC’s authority or the scope of PG&E’s application.

RRK supports FERC’s evaluation of the alternatives identified in the Notice of Scoping, particularly those that recognize the significant regional collaboration that has occurred over the past decade. RRK also agrees with FERC’s decision to eliminate from further consideration alternatives that are either outside the scope of this proceeding or beyond FERC’s and PG&E’s authority to implement, allowing the environmental review to remain focused on reasonable and actionable alternatives. While each alternative presents different environmental and operational tradeoffs, RRK believes the proposed NPUPL offers the best opportunity to balance ecological restoration in the Eel River with continued seasonal water-supply reliability for the Russian River watershed. The NPUPL serves a distinct but complementary purpose: it would allow ERPA to

³ https://www.pottervalleywater.org/pvid_history.html

⁴ <https://mendoiwpc.com/who-is-iwpc/>

⁵ <https://www.sonomawater.org/quick-facts>



construct a modern replacement diversion facility while the existing license remains in effect and while PG&E completes its work at Cape Horn Dam. Together, dam removal and NERF would support a transition away from an aging, dam-dependent system toward more predictable water management that is less vulnerable to dry hydrologic conditions while relieving ongoing direct and indirect harms to Eel River fisheries. This approach appropriately recognizes that PG&E is making a private business decision that is in the interest of their ratepayers and shareholders,⁶ while allowing for a continued diversion to the Russian River and facilitating the restoration of the Eel River habitat.

In addition, RRK supports FERC's decision to limit its environmental analysis of Russian River impacts to the East Branch Russian River rather than extending the analysis downstream of Coyote Dam. This appropriately reflects FERC's jurisdiction and the nature of the proposed federal action. Following license surrender, PG&E will no longer possess authority to operate or maintain the Potter Valley Project or continue trans-basin diversions under its existing license. Likewise, FERC cannot require PG&E to continue operating a regional water supply system after the hydroelectric license has been surrendered. Expanding the environmental review to include downstream operations below Coyote Dam would therefore require analysis of actions controlled by other agencies, water managers, and regulatory programs rather than environmental effects directly attributable to the proposed surrender.

Many of the downstream issues on the Russian River raised by commenters, including sediment management, water quality, reservoir operations, groundwater and surface water interactions, and implementation of fisheries protections, are already governed through separate regulatory processes and legal obligations. For example, Russian River operations below Coyote Dam are influenced by existing Biological Opinions, flood control requirements, and water management decisions that extend beyond PG&E and FERC's authority and the scope of this proceeding. Similarly, a range of issues, including sediment management in the Russian River are being independently addressed via legal and regulatory mechanisms that are not related to the Potter Valley Project or the license surrender process.

Maintaining a focused geographic scope will allow FERC to develop a more useful and legally defensible NEPA document while avoiding duplication of environmental review already occurring under other authorities. More importantly, it will allow agencies and stakeholders to concentrate their efforts on implementing the regional solutions necessary to improve long-term resilience within the Russian River watershed, including increased storage opportunities, improved water accounting, conservation measures, and the development of the New Eel-Russian Facility.

3. The Russian River's Long-Term Challenges Require Basin Resilience, Not Expanded Project Review

RRK recognizes that the Russian River watershed faces significant challenges that extend beyond the Potter Valley Project, including climate change, increasingly variable hydrology, water supply uncertainty, and growing demands on limited water resources. The long-term decline in Project

⁶ PG&E determined that the Project was not economically viable in January 2019, prior to infrastructure failures and seismic risks increasing. Other entities were offered an opportunity to purchase the Project at that time, but they all deemed it uneconomical as well.



diversions underscores this growing uncertainty: annual diversions fell from approximately 150,000 acre-feet before 2006, to approximately 60,000 acre-feet during 2007–2020, and approximately 30,000–40,000 acre-feet since 2021, reflecting regulatory changes, aging and failing infrastructure, seismic-related storage restrictions, drought, and reduced water availability during the dry season. This prolonged uncertainty has delayed important planning efforts and hindered the watershed’s ability to prepare for an already changing climate.

NERF would provide a more secure and predictable framework by shifting diversions primarily to the wet season, when Eel River flows are more readily available, so that water can be captured and stored in Lake Mendocino for use during the summer and fall. Although NERF cannot eliminate drought risk, its seasonal, flow-based operations would reduce dependence on increasingly unreliable summer flows and provide greater certainty for long-term water-supply planning.

That greater certainty is not a substitute for local resilience; it is the foundation needed to pursue it effectively. The transition away from the existing Project will allow the Russian River watershed to pair NERF with improved water management, expanded storage opportunities, groundwater recharge, Forecast-Informed Reservoir Operations, conservation, and other measures that reduce demand and improve supply reliability. Together, these efforts will better position the watershed to adapt to future conditions while maintaining environmentally responsible, seasonally appropriate diversions.

For these reasons, RRR respectfully urges FERC to move the surrender and decommissioning process forward without unnecessary delay, retain the NPUPL as part of the proposed action, and prepare a focused NEPA document addressing the resource issues identified above. FERC should reject efforts to unnecessarily expand the geographic scope appropriately identified by PG&E and focus its environmental analysis on effects directly connected to the federal action.

A focused review is necessary to support timely dam removal, rigorous mitigation and restoration, meaningful Tribal and public participation from both basins, and a workable transition to the separate permitting and operation of NERF. Further delay will only prolong reliance on failing infrastructure and unpredictable diversions, impede necessary resilience planning in the Russian River watershed, and jeopardize the locally coordinated implementation of the Two-Basin Solution. Moving forward now provides the best path toward ecological restoration in the Eel River, long-term resilience in the Russian River watershed, and more predictable water management for both basins.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide comment and welcome any questions that you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jaime Neary".

Jaime Neary
Policy Director & Staff Attorney
Russian Riverkeeper

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Don McEnhill".

Don McEnhill
Deputy Director
Russian Riverkeeper

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION

In Re: Application for Surrender of License
and for Non-Project Use of Project Lands
(Pacific Gas & Electric Company; Potter
Valley Hydroelectric Project No. P-77)

FERC Docket No. P-77-332

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I hereby certify that I have this day served, by first class mail or electronic mail, the Comments to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission by Russian Riverkeeper regarding Scoping Document 1 for PG&E's proposed license surrender and decommissioning of the Potter Valley Hydroelectric Project, P-77-332. This Certificate of Service is served upon each person designated on the official P-77-000 Service List compiled by the Commission in the above-captioned proceedings.

Dated: 24th day of July, 2026



Jaime Neary
Policy Director & Staff Attorney
Russian Riverkeeper
PO Box 1335
Healdsburg, CA 95448
jaime@russianriverkeeper.org