

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Upper North Fork Feather River (UNFFR) Hydroelectric Project is an existing 357.3-megawatt (MW) hydroelectric facility located on the North Fork Feather River and Butt Creek, in Plumas County, California. The project occupies 1,024 acres of lands of the United States administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management. The UNFFR Project consists of five hydraulically connected developments, with a total of three dams and reservoirs, five powerhouses, associated tunnels, surge chambers, and penstocks. The project has a combined average annual generation of 1,171.9 gigawatt-hours. Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) proposes no increased capacity.

In this draft environmental impact statement, we, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (Commission or FERC) staff, analyze the effects of continued project operations with added environmental measures. PG&E filed with the Commission (letter dated April 30, 2004) a settlement agreement (SA) reached by the Project 2105 Licensing Group on proposed protection, mitigation, and enhancement measures pertaining to streamflow management, recreation river flow management, reservoir operations, water year types, water quality monitoring, wildlife habitat enhancement, recreation, and land management and visual resource protection. We also consider a no-action alternative.

PG&E proposes to continue operating the UNFFR Project with the following protection and enhancement measures: (1) operate the project in accordance with the provisions of the SA, including streamflow management, recreation river flow management, reservoir operations, water year types, water quality monitoring, wildlife habitat enhancement, recreation, and land management and visual resource protection; (2) use the upper-level gates in the Canyon dam intake tower for releases to the Seneca bypassed reach beginning on September 15 and continuing until at least November 1; (3) continue to implement the road maintenance agreement between PG&E and the Plumas National Forest; (4) remove the Gansner Bar fish barrier on the Belden reach; (5) test bramble control methods at two to four river access sites along the Belden bypassed reach, including planting alders to shade out the brambles; (6) continue to comply with measures protecting bald eagles according to existing nesting territory management plans; (7) modify the project boundary to include 34 additional acres of the Plumas National Forest in the vicinity of the Caribou powerhouse and near Belden dam for the purposes of penstock maintenance and spoil management; and (8) finalize and implement a Historic Properties Management Plan.

Our analysis shows that the best alternative for the UNFFR Project is to issue a new license consistent with PG&E's proposed environmental measures (unless noted otherwise) with the following additional measures (staff's alternative): (1) include details that we specify in the following PG&E-proposed plans: (a) Lake Almanor water quality trend monitoring; (b) bioaccumulation (methylmercury and PCBs) monitoring in catchable-sized fish; (c) bacteriological monitoring; (d) aquatic monitoring; (e)

1 amphibian monitoring; and (f) shoreline management; (2) develop a spoil disposal plan;
2 (3) develop a water level and flow gaging plan; (4) use existing water temperature models
3 to assess the effects of operating the project to meet flow and lake level requirements; (5)
4 monitor DO levels in Lake Almanor, Butt Valley reservoir, and the NFFR downstream to
5 the Caribou No. 1 powerhouse tailrace; (6) develop site-specific plans to control erosion
6 and potential adverse effects on water quality for any recommended new recreational
7 facilities; (7) develop a notification and minimization of emergency and planned outage
8 spill plan; (8) develop a woody debris management plan; (9) develop an adaptive
9 management plan; (10) if modifications to the Prattville intake are proposed and
10 approved (to provide colder water in the NFFR), develop a plan to evaluate salmonid and
11 wakasagi populations in Lake Almanor and Butt Valley reservoir prior to and after any
12 modifications to the Prattville intake; (11) develop a vegetation and noxious weed
13 management plan that incorporates protection and management of valley elderberry
14 longhorn beetle habitat for all project lands; (12) develop a plan for the protection of
15 threatened, endangered, proposed for listing, and sensitive species; (13) develop a
16 peregrine falcon monitoring plan; (14) develop an interagency bald eagle management
17 plan; and (15) develop a fire prevention and response plan.

18 We estimate that the net annual benefit of the project as currently operated (the no-
19 action alternative) is \$52,484,700. The net annual benefit of the project as proposed by
20 PG&E is estimated to be \$44,044,800. The net annual benefit of the proposed project
21 with our additional recommended measures would be about \$43,806,600.

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