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Additional submitted attachment is included below.

county of ventura

September 7, 2016

California Energy Commission
Dockets Unit, MS-4
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

Subject: Preliminary Staff Assessment for the Proposed Puente Power Plant Project (15-AFC-01)

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Preliminary Staff Assessment (PSA) for the Proposed Puente Power Plant. Ventura County Planning Division staff has reviewed the PSA and is forwarding our comments in this letter. Our comments are organized in three sections including: Project Understanding, General Plan Consistency and Biological Resources. Based on our review of the potential impacts to visual, biological, and recreational resources associated with the proposed Puente Power Plant (P3), the Planning Division recommends that the new facility be constructed at an alternative site with fewer impacts to coastal resources.

Project Understanding

The proposed project site is located west of Harbor Boulevard and south of Gonzales Road within the City of Oxnard on 3 acres of the existing 36-acre Mandalay Generating Station (MGS) site. The proposed Puente Power Plant (P3) would be a natural gas-fired, simple-cycle, dry-cooled, 262-net-megawatt (MW) electrical generating facility consisting of a single, independently operating, single-fuel combustion turbine generator, natural gas compressor station, new underground fire loop, and back-up generator. The P3 would also include construction of a 188-foot exhaust stack and decommissioning the 1950s-era steam-powered MGS Units 1 and 2, including removal of the existing 200-foot exhaust stack.

The Proposed Project would connect to the regional electrical grid using the existing Southern California Edison switchyard located adjacent to the project site. No new offsite transmission lines are proposed; however, the project would require construction of four new 100-foot tall poles to connect into the existing SCE switchyard via new 220-kV lines.



Ventura County General Plan Consistency Comments

Although the proposed P3 project site is located within the City of Oxnard boundary, it is adjacent to Ventura County jurisdictional boundaries and within the sensitive resource area of the coastal zone. Ventura County's General Plan contains many environmental protection policies that target specific environmental impacts of development and should be considered as part of the LORS consistency analysis for the P3. Due to its proximity to County jurisdictional boundaries and potential environmental impacts, Planning Division staff reviewed the P3 in the context of consistency with the County's General Plan policies (GPP), and requests that the following policies be considered and evaluated in CEC's LORS analysis.

Agriculture: *GPP 1.6.2.6 Discretionary development adjacent to Agricultural-designated lands shall not conflict with agricultural use of those lands.*

Although the existing MSG is currently operating at the proposed location, the impacts of construction and operation of the new facility on the adjacent agricultural land, crops and workers should be considered and evaluated.

Visual resources: *GPP 1.7.2.1 ... development which would significantly degrade visual resources or significantly alter or obscure public views or visual resources shall be prohibited unless no feasible mitigation measures are available and the decision-making body determines there are overriding considerations.*

Given the location of the project site along a scenic drive and next to the coastline, feasible alternatives should be considered to protect visual resources. Although the existing MSG is currently operating at the proposed location, it has an indisputable visual impact on the coastal scenic drives (Harbor Boulevard and approaching roadways), from locations up and down the coast, and from the beach side as well. By constructing the new facility at this location, it will replace the existing stack with a slightly shorter stack and four new 100-foot transmission lines which will not only prolong on-going impacts on visual and recreational resources but further clutter the viewshed from both the land and beachside. Development of the P3, along with the 188-foot exhaust stack and 100-foot transmission poles and lines, will degrade public views. This is a significant impact on visual resources.

Coastal beaches and sand dunes: *GPP 1.10.2-1 Discretionary development which would cause significant impacts to coastal beaches or sand dunes shall be prohibited unless the development is conditioned to mitigate the impacts to less than significant levels.*

On-going impacts to the coastal environment, including the sand dunes and adjacent estuary, should be evaluated and mitigated. The new facility could be re-located to another, less environmentally sensitive location in order to help restore the invaluable and irreplaceable coastline to its natural condition.

Visual impacts of utility lines: GPP 4.5.2.1 New gas, electric, cable television and telephone utility transmission lines shall use or parallel existing utility rights of way where feasible and avoid scenic areas when not in conflict with the rules and regulations of the California Public Utilities Commission. When such areas cannot be avoided, transmission lines should be designed and located in a manner to minimize their visual impact.

Again, the construction of the new P3 will prolong the on-going visual impacts by extending the life of the power station at this location. Alternative designs or alternative locations should be utilized to mitigate these impacts.

Underground service lines: GPP 4.5.2.3 Discretionary development shall be conditioned to place utility service lines underground wherever feasible.

Undergrounding of the service lines would reduce visual impacts. See also comments under GPP 4.5.2.1 above.

Further, the discussion on climate change and sea level rise in the PSA (Part 2, page 5.2-36) does not provide enough detail to understand how the new facility and its employees will be protected from potential inundation from sea water intrusion and flooding. The development of a Tsunami Hazard Mitigation Plan (THMP), as suggested in the PSA, may help to protect employees and visitors from harm but cannot be evaluated since it has not been written yet. In addition, it would not necessarily address the environmental impact should the facility be damaged and rendered unusable. The PSA should discuss a plan for removal of the facility in the event it is damaged beyond repair.

In addition to the policies cited above, there are several other applicable policies in the County's General Plan related to hazards such as fault rupture, ground shaking, tsunamis and flooding that appear to be addressed in the PSA. However, additional comments may be provided by other County agencies having jurisdiction over those issue areas.

Biological Resources Comments

The Preliminary Staff Assessment (PSA) for the Proposed Puente Power Project (15-AFC-01) was reviewed by the Planning Division staff biologist. The California Energy Commission (CEC) should consider the following comments with regard to the analysis of impacts to biological resources set forth in the PSA.

Site Reconfiguration Alternatives

We strongly recommend that the CEC consider one of the Site Reconfiguration Options as a preferred alternative to the proposed project because it avoids impacts to Coastal Commission jurisdictional wetlands. The PSA presents three primary alternatives:

- No Project Alternative
- Site Reconfiguration Options (On-site Alternatives)
- Off-Site Alternatives.

The two Site Reconfiguration Options presented would avoid filling 2.03 acres of Coastal Commission jurisdictional wetlands. Reconfiguring the site would not create any new environmental impacts compared to the proposed P3. No other environmental project impacts would be reduced or avoided by reconfiguring the power plant facilities on the P3 site. However, these Alternatives present superior, feasible mitigation options. Selection of one of the two Site Reconfiguration Options would provide a superior mitigation option by avoiding impacts instead of mitigating them. The PSA states, "The two site reconfigurations would likely attain all of the project's basic objectives and may be feasible alternatives to the P3." It further states, "The Ormond Beach Area Off-site Alternative and the two Conceptual Site Reconfigurations would avoid some of the significant impacts associated with development of the P3. If avoiding these impacts is a critical factor, the off-site alternative and either of the site reconfigurations would be environmentally superior to the proposed P3."

Coastal wetlands in California have declined by an estimated 75 percent in the past few centuries¹. The PSA notes that the Coastal Commission jurisdictional wetlands are degraded and have no tidal influence. However, the value of these wetlands should be examined in the context of severe historic losses of coastal wetlands. Thus, any loss of coastal wetlands is potentially significant. The environmental analysis should also consider that the proposed 2:1 mitigation strategy relies on a couple of critical assumptions which could be false. The first assumption is that if mitigation is sought through restoration of degraded coastal wetlands, there would still be a temporal loss of wetland habitat until the habitat selected for restoration is fully restored. Another critical assumption is that the restoration is a success and full wetland habitat structure and function are restored. As a result, even with the proposed 2:1 mitigation strategy, temporal loss of wetland habitat could still result in impacts, especially if restoration is not a full success at the end of the restoration period. This may be a significant impact in the context of cumulative losses of historic wetland habitats.

For the reasons cited above, we recommend that the CEC consider *avoidance* of coastal wetland impacts, instead of *mitigation* of impacts to coastal wetlands, as a "critical factor", which makes the Site Reconfiguration Options the Environmentally Superior Alternative. We also recommend that the CEC choose the Environmentally Superior Option because of the sensitivity of coastal habitats and special status species in the vicinity.

Transmission Lines

The Proposed Project would connect to the regional electrical grid using the existing Southern California Edison switchyard located adjacent to the project site. No new offsite transmission lines are proposed. However, the project would require construction of four new, 100-foot tall poles to connect into the existing SCE switchyard via new 220-kV lines. Although the PSA states direct and indirect impacts to birds from collision with structures are expected to be minimal and consistent with baseline conditions, the addition of the proposed 100-foot tall poles and 220 kV lines could result in a significant impact to

¹ California Department of Parks and Recreation. 1988. California Wetlands. Sacramento 38pp.

special-status avian wildlife. The installation of four, 100-foot tall poles could also increase perching opportunities for predatory birds and could result in potentially significant impacts associated with depredation of special status nesting birds. Because of potentially significant impacts associated with bird strikes and predatory bird perching and depredation, these power lines should be placed underground. If this is not feasible, a monitoring program for bird strikes should be established, combined with the adaptive implementation of measures to prevent bird strikes from rising above threshold levels. In addition, power line pole design should consider incorporating perching deterrents to avoid indirect impacts to nesting wildlife.

In summary, we recommend that the new facility be constructed at an alternative site with less impacts on visual, biological and coastal recreation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the PSA. If you have questions regarding the biological resource comments, please contact Whitney Wilkinson at 805-654-2462 or whitney.wilkinson@ventura.org. If you have any questions regarding the remainder of the comments, please contact Kari Finley at 805-654-3327 or kari.finley@ventura.org.



Kari Finley, Senior Planner
Planning Division

C: Kim Prillhart, Planning Director
Rosemary Rowan, Long Range Planning Manager
Whitney Wilkinson, Staff Biologist