

FEDERAL ENERGY REGULATORY COMMISSION  
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20426  
January 5, 2024

OFFICE OF ENERGY PROJECTS

Project No. 1930-090 – California  
Kern River No. 1 Hydroelectric Project  
Southern California Edison Company

David Moore  
Relicensing Project Manager  
Southern California Edison Company  
1515 Walnut Grove Avenue  
Rosemead, CA 91770

**Reference: Comments on Proposed Study Plans**

Dear Mr. Moore:

After reviewing the Kern River No. 1 Hydroelectric Project's Pre-Application Document submitted on May 5, 2023, the Proposed Study Plan (PSP) submitted on October 17, 2023 and attending the proposed study plan meeting held on November 14, 2023, we have determined that additional information is needed to assess the adequacy of some proposed studies (enclosed in Schedule A). Please provide the requested information in your revised study plan, which must be filed by February 14, 2024.

Please note that, after reviewing comments and study requests to be filed by stakeholders by January 16, 2024, staff may require modifications to the approved study plan or additional information. If you have any questions, please contact Jessica Fefer at (202) 502-6631 or via e-mail at [Jessica.fefer@ferc.gov](mailto:Jessica.fefer@ferc.gov).

Sincerely,

Timothy Konnert, Chief  
West Branch  
Division of Hydropower Licensing

Enclosures: Schedule A

## Schedule A

### Comments on Preliminary Study Plans

#### REC 2 - Recreation Facility Use Assessment

1. Under the section *Study Approach*, the proposed study plan describes methods to estimate and characterize use at day use facilities and undeveloped areas that are different from methods proposed to estimate and characterize use on project trails. Specifically, vehicle counts and opportunistic in-person surveys are proposed at each day-use facility and undeveloped area, while consultation and survey-boxes are proposed for project trails. Please explain the methodological rationale for selecting these different approaches, including: (1) why project trails would not receive vehicle counts or in-person survey efforts, and (2) how consultation with parties who frequent the project trails would result in accurate use estimates and characterization. In the absence of a clear understanding of methodological considerations, we cannot determine if the study will accurately capture the necessary recreational use data.

#### TERR 1 – Botanical Resources Study

2. Under the section, *Extent of Study Area*, the proposed study area for riparian vegetation alliances, special aquatic features, special-status plants, and non-native invasive plants is the [area within the] FERC project boundary (excluding underground project features); 10 feet on either side of project access trails; and the bypassed reach. Please clarify if the proposed study area includes lands located *above* underground project features and specify within what distance on either side of the bypassed reach would the study document these botanical resources. Additionally, please explain the methodological rationale for selecting the proposed 10-foot buffer around access trails as well as any proposed buffer distance selected for the bypassed reach. Lastly, the proposed study plan states “for surveys at or around project facilities that are located outside of the FERC project boundary and on private property...”. Please describe which project facilities are currently located outside of the project boundary.

3. The *Study Approach* section states in order to characterize the relationship between the riparian vegetation and flow conditions in the bypassed reach, that “up to 10 cross-sections” would be established “at representative locations along the bypassed reach”. However, the plan does not explain for what environmental conditions (e.g., flows, vegetation types, etc.) the cross sections would be representative. The plan also does not explain if 10 is the total number of potential cross sections, or if 10 or fewer would be assessed for each type of representative environmental condition to be selected. Therefore, please describe any proposed methods and rationale for the selection of representative cross sections along the bypassed reach, including the number of cross sections.

4. The proposed study states that focused surveys for special-status plants and non-native, invasive plant species would be conducted by implementing field survey techniques including zigzag patterns, random meandering, and linear transects in the study area. However, the plan does not describe the level of effort that focused surveys would be conducted within the study area. Therefore, please provide more information on the following: the number, length/area, and type of surveys/transects (e.g., linear, zigzag) to be implemented, including the basis for the selected survey type; the number of surveyors; the minimum amount of time allocated per survey transect/area; where survey areas or transects would be located, including the basis for selecting their location (e.g., equally distributed across the study area and/or in representative vegetation alliances, specific habitat types, etc. mapped in the habitat assessment phase).

## **TERR 2 – Wildlife Resources Study**

5. Several federally threatened (2) and endangered species (9) and proposed (3) and candidate species (1) for listing under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) that could be affected by the project potentially occur in the project area.<sup>1</sup> The proposed Wildlife Resources Study states that the study objectives include identification of special-status wildlife species potentially occurring in the study area, including identification of potential habitat for special-status salamanders and potential use of project facilities by special-status bats. To meet this objective, the study would conduct: (1) a wildlife habitat assessment using existing georeferenced data on vegetation alliances, forest structure, and California wildlife-habitat relationships to develop a map of wildlife habitats occurring within the study area; and (2) wildlife reconnaissance surveys conducted along transects during the avian nesting season (March – June) to characterize wildlife use.

While detailed methods are described to assess ESA-proposed salamander species and special-status bats, it's unclear if the proposed study would examine the other ESA-designated species known to occur (e.g., California spotted owl), or potentially occurring in the project area and what, if any, species-specific methods would be implemented to identify their habitat or conduct surveys. Additionally, the methods generally lack sufficient detail for staff to adequately evaluate some provisions of the study. For example, the study plan does not describe the level of effort that reconnaissance surveys would be conducted across the study area. Therefore, in the revised study plan please clarify the items listed below.

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<sup>1</sup> On September 27, 2023, staff accessed the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Information for Planning and Consultation (IPaC) system to generate an official list of species and critical habitat designated under the ESA potentially occurring in the project area. The IPaC report can be accessed on the Commission's public record for the project at: [https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession\\_num=20230927-3023](https://elibrary.ferc.gov/eLibrary/filelist?accession_num=20230927-3023).

- (a) If the proposed habitat assessment study phase indicates suitable habitat is present for a federally listed or special-status species, please clarify if additional data collection would be conducted, such as ground-truthing identified habitat and/or focused surveys. Also, describe any pre-defined conditions/criteria that would trigger additional data collection.
- (b) For staff to understand if sufficient existing information is available, please specify which federally listed species potentially occurring in the project area you do not propose to conduct focused, species-specific surveys and describe the basis for why you determined such surveys are not necessary, including any specific documentation of consultation with FWS.
- (c) Describe the level of effort for the proposed reconnaissance surveys including: the number, length, and type of survey transects (e.g., linear, zigzag); number of surveyors; the minimum amount of time allocated per survey transect; where transects would be located, including the basis for selecting their location (e.g., equally distributed across the study area and/or in representative vegetation alliances/wildlife habitat mapped in the habitat assessment phase).
- (d) Provide the time of day and conditions (e.g., weather) when surveys would and would not be conducted.
- (e) Describe any specific methods that would be used for the proposed identification of bird nests within the study area (e.g., determination of nest status, nest searching methods, etc.).

6. The proposed study would document the configuration of project powerline poles and evaluate their consistency with Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APLIC) guidelines. APLIC guidelines are very comprehensive in scope and include recommendations for numerous types of electrified structures and configurations with consideration to their geographic location, surrounding topography, and adjacent vegetation. The proposed study does not specify what APLIC guidelines would be reviewed and documented. Therefore, please describe the specific APLIC guidelines (e.g., phase-to-phase spacing, insulators, siting of lines, etc.) the study would document on project powerlines as well as other electrified project structures.

7. The proposed study plan states that past avian electrocutions and mortalities on project powerlines would be documented based on SCE and resource agency consultation. No further information is provided. Please describe what sources of information would be reviewed, including whether standardized monitoring or incidental observations of avian electrocutions and mortalities along the powerlines have been implemented to identify potential hazards to birds.

8. The *Extent of Study Area* section states that the proposed study area for wildlife reconnaissance surveys would be the FERC project boundary (excluding underground project features) and 10 feet on either side of project access trails. Please clarify the proposed extent of the study area as we also request under item 2 above under *TERR 1 – Botanical Resources Study*.