



DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

[Project No. 2735-104]

Notice Soliciting Scoping Comments: Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Take notice that the following application has been filed with the Commission and is available for public inspection.

- a. Type of Application: New Major License
- b. Project No.: P-2735-104
- c. Date filed: April 18, 2024
- d. Applicant: Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E)
- e. Name of Project: Helms Pumped Storage Project (Helms Project or project)
- f. Location: The existing project is located approximately 50 miles northeast of the city of Fresno, on the North Fork Kings River and Helms Creek, in Fresno and Madera Counties, California. The project currently occupies 3,346.6 acres of federal land administered by the U.S. Forest Service, 28.36 acres of federal land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and 0.07 acre of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The project, if relicensed with the proposed project boundary modifications, would occupy a total of 2,887.7 acres of federal land administered by the U.S. Forest Service, 28.5 acres of federal land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, and 2.22 acres of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management.
- g. Filed Pursuant to: Federal Power Act 16 U.S.C. 791(a)-825(r).
- h. Applicant Contact: Mr. Dave Gabbard, Vice President Power Generation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, 300 Lakeside Drive, Oakland, CA 94612; telephone at (650) 207-9705; email at [David.gabbard@pge.com](mailto:David.gabbard@pge.com).
- i. FERC Contact: Evan Williams, (202) 502-8462, or email at [evan.williams@ferc.gov](mailto:evan.williams@ferc.gov).
- j. Deadline for filing scoping comments: **December 21, 2024**.<sup>1</sup>

The Commission strongly encourages electronic filing. Please file scoping comments using the Commission's eFiling system at

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<sup>1</sup> If the due date falls on a weekend or holiday, the due date is the following business day.

<https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOOnline.aspx>. Commenters can submit brief comments up to 6,000 characters, without prior registration, using the eComment system at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/QuickComment.aspx>. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support at [FERCOOnlineSupport@ferc.gov](mailto:FERCOOnlineSupport@ferc.gov), (866) 208-3676 (toll free), or (202) 502-8659 (TTY). In lieu of electronic filing, you may submit a paper copy. Submissions sent via the U.S. Postal Service must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 888 First Street NE, Room 1A, Washington, DC 20426. Submissions sent via any other carrier must be addressed to: Debbie-Anne A. Reese, Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, 12225 Wilkins Avenue, Rockville, Maryland 20852. All filings must clearly identify the project name and docket number on the first page: **Helms Pumped Storage Project (P-2735-104)**.

- k. This application is not ready for environmental analysis at this time.
- l. Project Description: The existing Helms Project (project) includes: (1) a 132-foot-long, 89-foot-wide, 58.5-foot-high concrete intake-discharge structure (Courtright Intake-Discharge Structure), with metal trash racks, in Courtright Lake; (2) one 4,243-foot-long tunnel (Tunnel 1) composed of two sections: (a) a 3,312-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined section; and (b) a 931-foot-long, 22-foot-diameter steel-lined section; (3) a 32.5-foot-long, 38-foot-wide, 45-foot-high gatehouse; (4) a 206-foot-long, 22-foot-diameter, above-ground steel pipe that connects Tunnel 1 and Tunnel 2; (5) one 9,016-foot-long tunnel (Tunnel 2) composed of two sections: (a) a 764-foot-long, 22-foot-diameter steel-lined section; and (b) a 8,252-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined section; (6) a 600-foot-long adit of an unknown diameter, with an adit plug with frame and gate; (7) a 535-foot-high, vertical shaft surge chamber for Tunnel 2 with a 47-foot-diameter lower section and 60-foot-diameter upper section, with 12 feet of the chamber exposed above grade; (8) a 2,205-foot-long penstock composed of three sections: (a) a 1,070-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined section; (b) a 300-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined section; and (c) a 330-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined manifold section, that branches into three, 505-foot-long steel-lined penstocks, that reduce in diameter from 15.5 feet, to 11.5 feet, to 10.5 feet until connecting to the turbine-generator; (9) a 336-foot-long, 83-foot-wide, 125-foot-high excavated rock chamber underground powerhouse that includes three, 360-megawatt (MW) vertical Francis-type pump-turbine units, for a total installed capacity of 1,080 MW, and three, vertical indoor generators with an approximate total nameplate capacity of 1,212 MW; (10) a 3,727-foot-long, 27-foot-diameter concrete-lined tunnel (Tunnel 3); (11) a 984-foot-tall, vertical shaft surge chamber for Tunnel 3 with a 27-foot-diameter lower section and a 44-foot-diameter upper section that transitions into a 10-foot-diameter air shaft topped by a 10-foot-tall, 14-foot-diameter protective device above grade; (12) an 88-foot-long, 78-foot-wide, 51-foot-high concrete intake-discharge structure (Wishon Intake-Discharge Structure), with metal trash racks, in Lake Wishon; (13) a 220-foot by-265-foot above ground, fenced switchyard; (14) an underground transformer bank of 10 transformers with a capacity of 150,000 kilo-volt-amperes each; (15) a 3,723-foot-long, 30-foot-wide, 25-foot-high powerhouse access tunnel; and (16) appurtenant facilities.

Although the project facilities do not include any dam or reservoir, PG&E operates the project for power generation using Courtright Lake (upper reservoir) and Lake Wishon (lower reservoir), impounded by Courtright Dam and Wishon Dam, respectively, which are licensed project facilities of the Hass-Kings River Hydroelectric Project (Project No. P-1988). Courtright Lake has a usable storage area of approximately 123,184 acre-feet and normal maximum and minimum water surface elevations of 8,184 feet and 8,050 feet, respectively. Lake Wishon has a usable storage area of approximately 128,606 acre-feet and normal maximum and minimum water surface elevations of 6,550 feet and 6,428.9 feet, respectively. To generate power, water is released from Courtright Lake through the Courtright Intake-Discharge Structure, Tunnel 1, Tunnel 2, and the penstock, into the powerhouse and is discharged through Tunnel 3 and the Wishon Intake-Discharge Structure into Lake Wishon. During periods of low energy demand, water is pumped through these project facilities in reverse (i.e., from Lake Wishon to Courtright Lake).

The project generators are connected to the regional electric grid by: (1) an underground transformer bank of 10 transformers with a capacity of 150,000 kilovolt-amperes each; (2) a 220-foot by- 265-foot above ground, fenced switchyard; and (3) a 60.7-mile-long, double-circuit 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line that connects the Helms switchyard to PG&E's interconnection point with the grid at the non-project Gregg Substation. The project also includes an approximately 1.8-mile-long, 21-kV distribution line from the non-project Woodchuck Substation to the Helms Headquarters and Helms Powerhouse and an approximately 2-mile-long, 21-kV distribution line from the non-project Woodchuck Substation to the Helms Support Facility and non-project Wishon Village Recreational Vehicle Park.

The project also includes: (1) the Helms Headquarters facility with ancillary facilities; (2) the Helms Support Facility with ancillary facilities; (3) project recreation facilities including the: (a) Courtright Boat Launch; (b) Trapper Springs Campground; (c) Marmot Rock Campground; (d) Wee-Mee-Kute Fishing Access; (e) Wishon Boat Launch; (f) Lily Pad Campground; (g) Upper Kings River Group Campground; (h) Wishon Dam Fishing Access; (i) Short Hair Creek Fishing Access; (j) Coolidge Meadow Fishing Access; (k) Helms Picnic Area; (l) Upper Kings River Fishing Access, and their ancillary facilities and amenities; (4) an approximately 80-acre Wildlife Habitat Management Area; (5) three, approximately 87-foot-diameter asphalt-surfaced helicopter landing pads; (6) 36.45 miles of non-recreation, vehicular project roads and trails; and (7) 1.08 miles of non-recreation, pedestrian project trails.

Although water is typically released from Courtright Lake into Lake Wishon for approximately 6 hours daily to generate electricity the timeframe can range from 4- to- 12 hours. The estimated annual generation from 2015 through 2022 was approximately 745 gigawatt-hours per year.

m. A copy of the application can be viewed on the Commission's website at

<https://www.ferc.gov> using the "eLibrary" link. Enter the docket number excluding the last three digits in the docket number field to access the document (P-2735). For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support (see item j above).

You may also register at <https://ferconline.ferc.gov/FERCOOnline.aspx> to be notified via email of new filings and issuances related to this or other pending projects. For assistance, please contact FERC Online Support (see item j above).

- n. The Commission's Office of Public Participation (OPP) supports meaningful public engagement and participation in Commission proceedings. OPP can help members of the public, including landowners, environmental justice communities, Tribal members and others, access publicly available information and navigate Commission processes. For public inquiries and assistance with making filings such as interventions, comments, or requests for rehearing, the public is encouraged to contact OPP at (202) 502-6595 or [OPP@ferc.gov](mailto:OPP@ferc.gov).
- o. Scoping Process

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Commission staff intends to prepare either an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) (collectively referred to as the "NEPA document") that describes and evaluates the probable effects, including an assessment of the site-specific and cumulative effects, if any, of the proposed action and alternatives. The Commission's scoping process will help determine the required level of analysis and satisfy the NEPA scoping requirements, irrespective of whether the Commission issues an EA or an EIS. At this time, we do not anticipate holding an on-site scoping meeting. Instead, we are soliciting written comments and suggestions on the preliminary list of issues and alternatives to be addressed in the NEPA document, as described in scoping document 1 (SD1), issued **November 21, 2024**.

Copies of SD1, which outlines the subject areas to be addressed in the NEPA document, were distributed to the parties on the Commission's mailing list and the applicant's distribution list. Copies of SD1 may be viewed on the web at <http://www.ferc.gov> using the "eLibrary" link. Follow the directions for accessing information in paragraph m.

Dated: November 21, 2024

Debbie-Anne A. Reese,  
Secretary.

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