

SCREENING FORM FOR LOW-EFFECT HCP DETERMINATIONS

I. Project Information

- A. Project name:** Southern California Gas Company Line 1010 - Purisima
- B. Affected species:** California tiger salamander (*Ambystoma californiense*, federally endangered, Santa Barbara County DPS), California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*, federally threatened)
- C. Project size (in stream miles and acres):** Approximately 1.04 acres of disturbance
- D. Brief project description including minimization and mitigation plans:**

The project area is in the Purisima Hills of Santa Barbara County between the cities of Lompoc and Buellton. The Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas; Applicant) would inspect and repair anomalies identified in pipeline 1010 to ensure pipeline integrity and comply with rules and regulations related to pipeline safety (Pipeline Safety Improvement Act of 2002 and other State and Federal regulations). The project would involve accessing and excavating the pipeline at four locations. The project may require heavy equipment, welding rigs, pickup trucks, portable restrooms, and ancillary equipment to access and excavate the dig locations. The Applicant will have fire suppression equipment on site in the form of a water truck, water buffalo, and/or hand pump spray units. The excavation footprints would be up to 80 feet long over the pipeline right-of-way and 10 to 20 feet wide (up to 1,600 square feet of disturbance per dig location). The project also would require two areas for staging and laydown of equipment and materials. One staging/laydown area for digs 10 and 11 of approximately 0.5 acre would be located in the grassland/pasture area that surrounds and includes the excavation areas for digs 10 and 11. This staging area would cause approximately 0.5 acre of upland habitat disturbance by compacting vegetation and soil but would not involve any earth moving outside the actual dig sites. The staging area for digs 13 and 14 would occur on existing driveway, parking, and corral areas and would not cause new disturbance. The project would take approximately 9 to 16 weeks to complete.

The expected disturbance would occur in upland habitat suitable for the California tiger salamander and California red-legged frog (covered species). The project area contains grassland, scrub, and chaparral habitat suitable for dispersal, as well as rodent burrows, which could be used by the covered species. The project area does not contain aquatic habitat but is adjacent to two ponds known to support the covered species and is within dispersal distance from additional aquatic and other habitats known to be occupied by the covered species. SoCalGas is seeking an incidental take permit to allow temporary habitat disturbances associated with implementation of the project. SoCalGas is requesting a 5-year permit duration.

The Applicant developed a Habitat Conservation Plan (SoCalGas 2015) (HCP; incorporated by reference) that includes measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate

impacts to the covered species. The Applicant designed the project to minimize habitat disturbance and other impacts to the covered species. Measures to avoid and minimize impacts include, but are not limited to, avoiding rodent burrows; pre-construction briefings with project workers; surveys and monitoring by a qualified biologist during disturbance activities; capture and relocation of covered species from the project area; seeding disturbed areas for passive habitat restoration; monitoring habitat restoration progress; and seasonal, daily, and weather restrictions on disturbance activities. To mitigate for the impacts of taking the California tiger salamander and California red-legged frog, the applicant will purchase 1 acre of habitat credit in the La Purisima Conservation Bank (Bank). The Bank provides permanently preserved aquatic and upland habitat managed primarily for the California tiger salamander; however, these habitats also are suitable for the California red-legged frog.

II. Does the HCP fit the following low-effect criteria?

A. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and their habitats covered under the HCP prior to implementation of the minimization and mitigation measures?

Yes.

The project would not affect breeding habitat for the covered species. Total disturbance of habitat suitable for the covered species would not exceed 1.04 acres of upland habitat, and all disturbance would be temporary. The dig areas contain few rodent burrows, and the applicant proposed measures to avoid burrows and disturbance to the extent possible. We expect the proposed project to cause negligible impacts on the covered species, because (1) SoCalGas will implement measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the covered species, (2) the area of affected habitat is a very small proportion of the habitat available to the La Purisima metapopulation of California tiger salamander and an even smaller proportion of habitat available to the entire Santa Barbara County distinct population segment (DPS) of the species, (3) the California red-legged frog occupies a much larger geographic range than the California tiger salamander and therefore would be affected to an even smaller extent than the California tiger salamander, (4) no permanent habitat loss would occur, and (5) very few, if any, individuals of the covered species would be affected.

B. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on other environmental values or resources (e.g. air quality, geology and soils, water quality and quantity, socio-economic, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, transportation, climate change and greenhouse gases, etc.) prior to implementation of the minimization and mitigation measures?

Yes.

The project would result in negligible impacts to air quality, because (1) the proposed activities would occur over a short duration; (2) exhaust emissions would be minor,

because few vehicles and machines would be required; (3) dust creation would be minor, because the dig areas are small; and (4) any impacts to air quality would be temporary.

The project would have negligible impacts on geology and soils. There would be no unique disturbance to geology or soils, because the project area was previously disturbed during pipeline installation. In addition, the project area is small, disturbance will be temporary, and the applicant will implement erosion control measures. Therefore, we expect only negligible loss of soil to wind and water erosion.

The project would have negligible impacts on water quality and quantity, because the activities would not occur in wetlands, and we expect minimal soil runoff from the disturbance areas. Runoff from dig area 14 would not impact any wetlands. Runoff from dig areas 10, 11, 13 could enter adjacent seasonal wetlands; however, given the small size of the dig areas, and the proposed erosion control measures, we expect any impact from runoff to be negligible.

The project would have no effect on land use. The activities would cause temporary disturbance to the SoCalGas right-of-way and previously disturbed roads, agricultural areas, and parking areas on private property. Land use in the project area would not be altered as a result of the project.

The project would have no effect on historic or cultural resources. Based on an analysis of cultural resource records and a survey of the Plan Area (Sapphos 2015), we determined that the Plan Area does not contain cultural or archaeological resources. In addition, the project area was previously disturbed during pipeline installation, land use conversion to agriculture, and development of roadways and parking areas. Therefore, the project would not disturb any areas that were not previously disturbed. If cultural materials are observed in the Plan Area during implementation of the HCP, work will cease to allow an assessment of the finding by a qualified archaeologist.

The project would have no effect on recreation or socio-economic considerations. The project would occur on the SoCalGas right-of-way and private property that is not currently used for public recreation. In addition, the purpose of the project is to maintain pipeline 1010 and public safety. The project does not have an economic or business function that would affect the public.

The project would cause negligible impacts to visual resources. The entire project area is located in a low-population-density, rural area. Dig areas 13 and 14 are both over 2 miles from Highway 246, and work in these areas is likely to be seen only by the landowners. Dig areas 10 and 11 are adjacent to Highway 246 and passing motorists are likely to see several construction vehicles or machines working at these areas. This may cause a brief disruption of the rural ranching/agricultural aesthetic prevalent along this portion of Highway 246. However, work at these dig areas would take a short time (8 weeks maximum—4 weeks maximum per dig, but more likely 2 weeks per dig) to complete and would not cause permanent impacts to visual resources. Therefore, we expect the project to have negligible impacts on visual resources.

The project would have no impact on transportation. Project activities would occur on the SoCalGas right-of-way and private property and would not require any modification of traffic patterns.

The project will require several construction vehicles or machines to complete the proposed activities, and the project would take approximately 9 to 16 weeks to complete (2 to 4 weeks per dig). The construction vehicles/machinery would emit greenhouse gasses during operation; however, these emissions would be insignificant compared to the extensive automobile traffic on Highway 246, which averaged between 7,600 and 17,800 automobiles per day in 2012 (CalTrans 2012). In addition, the proposed activities are a one-time event and would occur over a short time period. Therefore, we expect the proposed activities would make a minor, temporary contribution to reduced air quality in the immediate vicinity of the project areas, but would make a negligible short-term or long-term contribution to atmospheric greenhouse gasses and climate change.

C. Would the impacts of this HCP, considered together with the impacts of other past, present and reasonably foreseeable similarly situated projects not result, over time, in cumulative effects to environmental values or resources that would be considered significant?

Yes.

Much of the project area consists of previously disturbed agricultural areas, roadways, and parking areas that are unsuitable as habitat for the covered species and contain few environmental resources. The portions of the project area that contain suitable upland habitat for the covered species are an extremely small percentage of the habitat available to the Purisima metapopulation of California tiger salamanders and an even smaller percentage of the habitat available to the covered species rangewide. In addition, the project would require a short time to complete, and any impacts of the project would be temporary. Therefore, the project itself would not contribute to cumulative impacts to environmental values or resources.

While substantial areas of suitable habitat for the covered species near the project area have been converted to agriculture, there are also large areas of suitable habitat for the covered species adjacent to and near the project area that are protected (i.e., La Purisima Conservation Bank), have compatible land uses (i.e., grazing), or are otherwise undeveloped. We are not aware of any reasonably foreseeable projects that would result in cumulative impacts to the covered species or other aspects of the human environment in the vicinity of the project area.

The proposed digs are a result of SoCalGas' recent internal inspections of pipeline 1010, which did not show other inspection anomalies in areas known to be occupied by the covered species. Any future digs to inspect anomalies and comply with safety regulations would likely cause similar minor impacts and be in widely separated project areas. As such, there would not be significant cumulative effects to environmental values

or resources.

III. Do any of the exceptions to categorical exclusions apply to this HCP? (form 516 DM 2, Appendix 2).

Would implementation of the HCP:

A. Have significant adverse effects on public health or safety?

No. SoCalGas' ultimate purpose of the project is to ensure pipeline safety and integrity in accordance with State and Federal regulations to avoid adverse effects on public health and safety. The project area is in an area of very low human population density; the proposed activities would occur over a short time period; the proposed activities would not affect water resources and would have minimal, temporary effects to air quality; and none of the proposed activities present a risk level beyond that typical of small scale earth-moving and construction equipment. Therefore, implementation of the HCP would not have significant adverse effects on public health or safety.

B. Have adverse effects on such unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources, park, recreation or refuge lands, wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, sole or principal drinking water aquifers, prime farmlands, wetlands, floodplains, or ecologically significant or critical areas, including those listed on the Department's National Register of Natural Landmarks?

No. The project area would occur on private property within the SoCalGas right-of-way and previously has been disturbed during installation of pipeline 1010. The area is rural and dominated by grazing and agricultural land uses. SoCalGas designed the project to ensure that no unique geographic characteristics would be affected (e.g., excluding nearby seasonal wetlands from the project area). Based on an analysis of cultural resource records and a survey of the Plan Area (Sapphos 2015), the Plan Area does not contain cultural or archaeological resources. In addition, the effects of the proposed activities would be temporary, as SoCalGas would restore the disturbed areas and allow them to revert to their prior vegetated state. Therefore, there would be no adverse effects on unique geographic characteristics.

C. Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA section 102(2)(E)]?

No. The project area would occur on private property within the SoCalGas right-of-way, and SoCalGas coordinated with the two landowners during project planning. In addition, SoCalGas would implement measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the covered species, and the effects of the proposed activities would be temporary, as SoCalGas would restore the disturbed areas. Lastly, SoCalGas' ultimate purpose of the project is to ensure pipeline safety and integrity to avoid adverse effects on public health and safety. Therefore, we do not expect any controversial environmental effects or unresolved conflicts.

D. Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?

No. The project would have insignificant environmental effects, because the activities would disturb a small area; would impact few, if any, individuals of the covered species; and the impacts to covered species, habitats, and other environmental resources would be temporary. The project activities would involve routine earthmoving and pipeline maintenance practices and do not involve any unique or unknown environmental risks.

E. Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?

No. The project is limited in size and scope, designed for a specific purpose, and follows previously established pipeline maintenance procedures. SoCalGas expects any future inspection/repair activities along pipeline 1010 to be of similar limited size and scope. As such, implementing the HCP would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions.

F. Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects?

No. The project is limited in size and scope, designed for a specific purpose, follows previously established pipeline maintenance procedures, and the project activities are unrelated to the rural residential, grazing, and agricultural land uses surrounding the project area. SoCalGas expects any future inspection/repair activities to be of similar limited size and scope. In addition, the effects of the project on the covered species and other environmental resources would be minor and temporary. For these reasons, implementation of the HCP would not contribute to cumulative environmental effects.

G. Have adverse effects on properties listed or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places?

No. The project would occur on private property within the SoCalGas right-of-way in an area dominated by grazing and agricultural land uses. Further, the project area was previously disturbed during pipeline installation, land use conversion to agriculture, and development of roadways and parking areas. Accordingly, the project would not cause any original disturbance in the project area. Lastly, the Applicant conducted an investigation of the project area, and no cultural resources or resources listed or eligible to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places were identified at that time (Sapphos 2015). Therefore, no properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places would be affected by implementation of the HCP.

H. Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species?

No. We expect that the effects on the covered species would include capture and relocation of a few individuals of the covered species from small mammal burrows, as well as temporary impacts to upland habitat (the project would not affect breeding habitat for the covered species). SoCalGas will implement measures to avoid the possibility of injury or death of covered species to the extent possible; however, up to two individuals of each covered species could be injured or killed during project activities. The plan area does not contain designated critical habitat for the California red-legged frog. Digs 10, 11, and 13 are located within critical habitat for the California tiger salamander. However, total disturbance of habitat suitable for the covered species would not exceed 1.04 acres of upland habitat, and all disturbance would be temporary. The dig areas contain few rodent burrows, and the applicant proposed measures to avoid burrows and disturbance to the extent possible. Accordingly, impacts to the covered species and designated critical habitat would be insignificant.

We expect the proposed project to cause negligible impacts on the covered species and designated critical habitat, because (1) SoCalGas will implement measures to avoid and minimize impacts to the covered species, (2) the area of affected habitat is a very small proportion of the habitat available to the La Purisima metapopulation of California tiger salamander, and an even smaller proportion of habitat available to the entire Santa Barbara County DPS, (3) the California red-legged frog occupies a much larger geographic range than the California tiger salamander and would be affected to an even smaller extent, (4) no permanent habitat loss would occur, and (5) a very small percentage of, if any, individuals of the covered species would be injured or killed.

I. Threaten to violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

No. SoCalGas would ensure that the proposed project complies with other Federal, State of California, and County of Santa Barbara laws, regulations, policies, and other requirements. No tribal lands occur in the HCP area.

J. Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898).

No. The project would occur in an area of low human population density on private property within the SoCalGas right-of-way, and SoCalGas coordinated with the two landowners during project planning. The project would not adversely affect low income or minority populations, or the public in general.

K. Have the possibility to limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007).

No. The project would occur entirely on private land, would not affect cultural resources on Federal lands, and would not limit access to or use of Federal lands.

- L. Have the possibility to significantly contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and EO 13112).**

No. While a portion of the HCP area is native coastal scrub, the majority of the area is occupied by common, non-native grassland species. SoCalGas will revegetate disturbed areas using a native seed mix and will monitor the disturbance areas, identify invasive species uncommon in the Plan Area, and prevent them from establishing. Despite these measures, it is likely that invasive species will occupy the disturbed areas to some extent during and after the permit term. However, we do not expect project activities to introduce any new non-native species to the HCP area. In addition, given the small HCP area and the commonness of the non-native species present, we do not expect project activities to contribute to expansion of the range of non-native species in the HCP area.

- M. Have adverse effects on wetlands, floodplains or be considered a water development project thus requiring compliance with either Executive Order 11988 (Floodplain Management), Executive Order 11990 (Protection of Wetlands), or the Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act?**

No. The proposed project occurs entirely within upland habitat, and no adverse effects to wetlands or floodplains would occur. Implementation of the HCP would not constitute a water development project. .

References

- [CalTrans] California Department of Transportation. 2014. Corridor data sheet, state route 246. Accessed June 11, 2015, at http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist05/planning/sys_plan_docs/tcr_factsheet_combo/sb_sr246_tcrfs.pdf. California Department of Transportation, District 5, Transportation and Planning. San Luis Obispo, California.
- [Sapphos] Sapphos Environmental, Inc. 2015. Archaeological survey letter report for line 1010 validation dig sites. Pasadena, California. 11 pages.
- [SoCalGas] Southern California Gas Company. 2015. Draft low-effect habitat conservation plan for the endangered California tiger salamander and the threatened California red legged frog. June 22, 2015. Prepared by Sage Institute, Inc.; San Luis Obispo; California.