

Screening Form
Low-Effect Incidental Take Permit Determination and
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
Environmental Action Statement

I. Project Information

A. Project Name:

Natural Gas Transmission Line 247 Replacement Project, Santa Barbara County, California (project). Application for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the approved General Conservation Plan (GCP) for Oil and Gas Activities in Santa Barbara County.

B. Affected Species:

Federally threatened California red-legged frog (*Rana draytonii*).

C. Project Size (in stream miles and/or acres):

The proposed project is located in an unincorporated portion of Santa Barbara County, approximately 10 miles west of the City of Goleta at 100 El Capitan Terrace Lane and 11180 Calle Real. The project is approximately 3,600 linear feet and parallels Calle Real immediately north of the El Capitan State Beach exit (Exit 117) off United States Highway 101. The project is located on Assessor Parcel Numbers 081-230-035 and 081-250-014. The project is expected to temporarily impact 0.32 acre of upland habitat and 2.67 acre of dispersal habitat.

D. Brief Project Description (including minimization and mitigation plans):

The Southern California Gas Company (Applicant) applied for an ITP, pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended. If approved, the ITP would be issued to the Applicant under the GCP for Oil and Gas Activities. The GCP was approved on June 27, 2022 (publication of the notice of availability of the draft environmental assessment (EA) and GCP was on March 6, 2020 [85 *Federal Register* 13181]). The Service prepared an EA to analyze the effects of approving the GCP as a mechanism for issuing ITPs which did not evaluate the effects of specific projects themselves. Therefore, the Service prepared this NEPA document to analyze the effects of the proposed project.

The Applicant is proposing to remove an existing 1,200-foot-long bypass line to the west of El Capitan Creek. Removal of the bypass line would require an approximately 3-foot (ft)-wide by 1,200-ft-long trench in a 15-ft-wide workspace. Removal of the bypass line is anticipated to take approximately 6 weeks. Segment 2 of project activities would require a jack and bore method of drilling of approximately 175 linear ft to install a replacement 16-inch (in) steel pipeline by excavation of an open trench. The existing pipeline under El Capitan Creek would be abandoned in place to limit disturbance to riparian habitat. A temporary 8-in-diameter and 56-ft-long bypass line would be tied in on the eastern end to

provide service during construction. Segment 2 of project activities is anticipated to take approximately 16 weeks to complete. The applicant would backfill trenches with a layer of sand slurry at the bottom and then recompact with native soil following the installation of the replacement pipeline. Additionally, the applicant would return all excavated areas to its original grade and revegetate them with native seed mix. The length of the permit would be for 5 years after ITP issuance.

There are no known California red-legged frog observations within the permit impact area. However, California red-legged frogs dispersal habitat exists within the project area and the nearest observation of the species is within 1 mile of the project area. The most recent occurrence record was in March 2024, approximately 2,000 feet south of the project site in the estuary at El Capitan State Beach.

The project includes avoidance and minimization measures for the California red-legged frog and mitigation for unavoidable impacts to their habitat that are consistent with the GCP. The applicant has proposed a one-time fixed payment of \$21,350 to the California red-legged frog mitigation account managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to compensate for unavoidable impacts to the California red-legged frog.

The Service has determined that the proposed Project meets the scope of the GCP and is eligible for the GCP permitting process. The biological goals and objectives, monitoring, minimization, and mitigation measures proposed by the Applicant are consistent with those included in the GCP for Oil and Gas Activities; therefore, they are incorporated by reference.

II. Does the Project fit the following Department of Interior and Fish and Wildlife Service categorical-exclusion criteria?

A. Are the effects of the Project minor or negligible on federally listed, proposed, or candidate species and their habitats covered under the HCP?

Yes. Effects of the Project on the California red-legged frog would be both minor and negligible. Project implementation would disturb dispersal and upland habitat totaling 2.99 acres, but the project impacts would be temporary and would not affect persistence of the California red-legged frog across their range. The GCP was developed by the Service to promote the long-term conservation of the California red-legged frog in Santa Barbara County, and it includes standardized conservation measures to minimize and mitigate any impacts to the species. The Applicant proposes to implement the standard conservation measures included in the GCP; therefore, the Service has preliminarily determined that take would be minimized and mitigated to the maximum extent practicable.

B. Are the effects of the HCP minor or negligible on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources (e.g. air quality, geology and soils, water quality and quantity, socio-economic, cultural resources, recreation, visual resources, environmental justice, etc.), after implementation of the minimization and mitigation measures?

Yes, the effects of the HCP are minor or negligible on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources. The applicant would return all excavated areas to their original grades and revegetate them with native seed mix. Additionally, the applicant would monitor restoration sites within the project area for a minimum of 5 years, or until the Service determines that the project's long-term performance standards to be satisfied.

The impacts to air quality would be minimized to a negligible level as required by the permit from Air Pollution Control District of Santa Barbara County. The project would not increase water demand or usage in the area and the project is not anticipated to have any effects on water quality. The project is expected to have no impact on recreational areas and construction of this project would not impact any existing recreation in the area. The project would not result in an increase in population growth or remove a barrier to growth in the area. On April 24, 2022, the Applicant's consultant received negative results for a records search request they submitted to the Native American Heritage Commission. In addition, the Applicant's consultant conducted surveys of the work area and found no tribal cultural resources. Therefore, the Service anticipates any effects of the proposed project would be minor or negligible to the human environment, including environmental values and resources after the incorporation of mitigation measures.

C. Would the incremental impacts of this HCP, considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions (regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions) not result, over time, in a cumulative effects to the human environment (the natural and physical environment) which would be considered significant?

Yes. The impacts of this project considered together with the impacts of other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions would not result in significant cumulative effects to the human environment. The proposed project would be small and temporary in time, would not disturb a component of a larger natural habitat, and would not disturb habitat that currently supports most species native to the area. We anticipate effects from this type of pipeline replacement project would have minor or negligible effects on all other components of the human environment, including environmental values and environmental resources.

III. Do any of the exceptions to categorical exclusions (extraordinary circumstances) listed in 43 CFR 46.215 apply to this HCP?

Would implementation of the HCP:

A. Have significant impacts on public health or safety?

No. The project would not have any impacts on public health or safety. The project is located just south of El Capitan Canyon Resort, however, project activities would be outside of all camp sites and would be approximately 100 ft to the nearest open use parking lot and separated by vegetation. There would be no conflict with use by the public. Construction would be temporary and generate minimal machinery odors which would dissipate within a short distance of the work area.

B. Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as: historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990) or floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds, eagles, or other ecologically significant or critical resources?

No. Implementation of the project would not have significant impacts on natural resources and unique geographic characteristics such as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds, eagles; or other ecologically significant or critical areas, due to none occurring in the project area.

C. Have highly controversial environmental effects (defined at 43 CFR 46.30), or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [see NEPA section 102(2)(E)]?

No. The project is consistent with County of Santa Barbara zoning laws and regulations and is consistent with allowable land uses. The project would not conflict with any applicable zoning laws or other regulations during construction and operation. We do not anticipate significant environmental effects or controversies associated with implementation of the project.

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

No. The proposed project includes only activities associated with the replacement of the existing pipeline Line 247 and does not have any highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks. Replacement of the existing pipeline has been designed to avoid El Capitan Creek and native habitat. Additionally, the replacement is in the same footprint as the existing pipeline in a regional infrastructure and transportation corridor.

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

No, the proposed project is limited in size and scope. Implementation of this project would require temporary excavations to replace a segment of the existing natural gas transmission Line 247. Installation of the replacement 16-in steel pipeline of the same diameter would not alter the length of the existing pipeline. As a result, additional development would not be facilitated and would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions that would potentially cause significant environmental effects.

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

No. This project is a single action and is not directly related to any other projects.

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

No. A search of the National Register of Historic Places (<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalregister/database-research.htm#table>) revealed no cultural or historic sites listed or eligible for listing within the project area.

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. The project would not have significant impacts to California red-legged frogs. The project would result in temporary impacts to the species dispersal and upland habitat, but it constitutes a small portion the species' range, and we anticipate the work area would be restored to its preexisting conditions after construction is completed. The project includes avoidance and minimization measures for the California red-legged frog and mitigation for unavoidable impacts to their habitat. The applicant has proposed a one-time fixed payment of \$21,350 to the California red-legged frog mitigation account managed by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to compensate for unavoidable impacts to the California red-legged frog.

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

No, implementation of the project would not violate a Federal law, or a State, local, or tribal law, or a requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. The project and incidental take permit issuance would fulfill Federal environmental compliance. This project is subject to the California Endangered Species Act review pursuant to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Environmental Quality Act review pursuant to the County of Santa Barbara implementing guidelines, and other Federal, State, and local environmental laws and requirements. The project would not affect tribal lands.

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

No. The proposed project would have no effect on low income or minority populations. The project is confined in scope and is not anticipated to cause effects beyond the project site itself. Additionally, the proposed project is located within unincorporated Santa Barbara County, approximately 10 miles west of the city of Goleta and is not immediately residential areas given the remoteness of the proposed project along United States Highway 101.

K. 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 (Executive Order 13007).

No. Ceremonial or sacred sites do not occur on the proposed project site and project activities would be temporary.

L. 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 Executive Order 13112).

No. The project includes measures to plant native plants after ground disturbing activities, to reduce the prevalence of non-native invasive plant species, and thus the project would not contribute to the introduction, continued existed, or spread of non-native invasive plants. We do not anticipate that the project would contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of non-native invasive animals.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION STATEMENT

To be completed after the 30-day public comment period.