



State of California – The Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Ecosystem Conservation Division
Habitat Conservation Planning Branch
1010 Riverside Parkway
West Sacramento, CA 95605
www.wildlife.ca.gov

GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



June 17, 2022

Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety
California Natural Resources Agency
715 P Street, 20th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety,

Subject: Bear Valley Electric Service's 2022 Wildfire Mitigation Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding Bear Valley Electric Service's (BVES) 2022 Wildfire Mitigation Plan (Plan). The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) reviewed the Plan for activities that may affect California's fish and wildlife or may require CDFW approval under the Fish and Game Code.

CDFW is submitting comments per Public Resource Code section 8386, subdivision (d), to inform the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety about relevant regulations and potentially significant impacts to sensitive fish and wildlife resources associated with vegetation management activities and other activities included in the Plan.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State. (Fish and G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15386, subd. (a).) CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Fish and G. Code, § 1802.). Similarly, under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a Responsible Agency under CEQA. (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15381.) Many of the Plan's activities can be conducted through use of existing exemptions. However, work conducted under the Plan may still be subject to Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. (Lake and Streambed Alteration) or may result in "take", as defined by State law, of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.) Discretionary approvals from CDFW are subject to the

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requirements of CEQA (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15268, subd. (d)). If subsequent project scoping under the Plan identifies elements that may be subject to CDFW's permitting authority, early consultation with CDFW is encouraged. Preparation of CEQA documents to support discretionary actions could lead to extended timeframes for completion of Plan activities.

REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS

California Endangered Species Act

If Plan activities have the potential to result in take of plants or animals listed under CESA (Fish and G. Code, § 2080 et seq.), compliance with CESA is required, either through full avoidance measures or obtaining take coverage through a CESA Incidental Take Permit (ITP). Section 2081, subdivision (b), of the Fish and Game Code allows CDFW to authorize take of species listed as endangered, threatened, or candidate if that take is incidental to otherwise lawful activities and if certain conditions are met. If Plan activities may impact CESA listed species, early consultation with CDFW is encouraged, as modification to Plan activities and mitigation measures may be required to obtain a CESA ITP.

Fully Protected Species

Certain species are Fully Protected and may not be taken or possessed at any time as per Fish and Game Code sections 3511 (birds), 4700 (mammals), 5050 (reptiles and amphibians), and 5515 (fish). The lone exception to these statutes is Fish and Game Code section 2835 which allows the take of Fully Protected species under a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP).

Birds

Fish and Game Code section 3503 makes it unlawful to take, possess, or needlessly destroy the nests or eggs of any bird, while Fish and Game Code section 3503.5 states that no birds-of-prey or their nests and eggs may be taken, possessed, or destroyed. Fish and Game Code section 3513 makes it unlawful to take or possess any migratory nongame bird as designated in the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) (16 U.S.C. § 703 et seq.), except as provided by rules or regulations adopted by the Secretary of the Interior under the MBTA. Fish and Game Code section 3800 makes it unlawful to take any nongame bird (i.e., bird that is naturally occurring in California that is not a gamebird, migratory game bird, or fully protected bird) except as provided in the Fish and Game Code.

Lake and Streambed Alteration

CDFW requires a notification of Lake or Streambed Alteration (LSA), pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 1600 et. seq., for Plan activities that may substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow; change or use material from the bed, channel, or bank including associated riparian or wetland resources; or deposit or dispose of material where it may pass into a river, lake, or stream. Work within ephemeral streams, washes, watercourses with a subsurface flow, and floodplains may also be subject to the requirement to notify.

Pollution

Fish and Game Code sections 5650 and 5652 prohibit the deposition, passage of, or disposal of deleterious materials into the waters of the state, or within 150 feet of the highwater mark of waters of the state. Such materials would include products from vegetation maintenance activities, such as sawdust, shavings, slabs, or edgings, and materials deleterious to fish, plant life, mammals, or bird life, such as gas, oil, and other petroleum-based products, and sediment-laden runoff and erosion from vegetation removal activities if soil stabilization measures are not employed.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Comment: All activities covered under the Plan should be evaluated for potential impacts to the state's fish and wildlife resources to ensure compliance with Fish and Game Code and to ensure all discretionary approvals and permits are obtained prior to commencing Plan activities.

Based on CDFW's review of the Plan and our authorities listed above, the activities summarized below have the potential to impact sensitive fish and wildlife resources. This list is not inclusive because the Plan does not include detailed information on the specific methods for each activity, where or when activities will occur, best management practices that will be implemented during activities, or an analysis of impacts.

Vegetation management activities that have the potential to impact sensitive fish and wildlife resources:

- Fuel management: removing, thinning, or altering vegetation
- Tree trimming
- Brush clearing
- Tree removal (hazardous and "at-risk species")
- Emergency response vegetation management (preventative) and vegetation management activities post-fire
- Substation vegetation management (distribution, transmission, and hydro generation)
- Chemical application for vegetation management: herbicides or growth retardants
- On-site mastication, chipping, mulching or other disposal of vegetation materials near waters of the state

Other activities that have the potential to impact sensitive fish and wildlife resources:

- Work to establish or clear staging areas and roads to gain access to worksites
- Overhead electric facility hardening or undergrounding
- Fuel management, and management of all wood and "slash" from vegetation management activities
- Infrastructure maintenance, replacement, or reinforcement
- Installation of new equipment

BVES may need to modify Plan activities with implementation of avoidance measures and/or obtain discretionary approval or permits if the activities have the potential to result in:

- Take of CESA listed species or rare plant species (Fish and G. Code, §§ 2080 et seq. & 1900 et seq.)
- Take or possession of fully protected species (Fish and G. Code, §§ 3511, 4700, 5050, 5515)
- Take of, possession of, or needlessly destroying the nest or eggs of any bird (Fish and G. Code, § 3503)
- Take of, possession of, or destroying any bird-of-prey or their nest or eggs (Fish and G. Code, § 3503.5)
- Take or possession of any migratory nongame bird (Fish and G. Code, § 3513)
- Take of any nongame bird (Fish and G. Code, § 3800)
- Substantial diversion or obstruction of the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake (Fish and G. Code, § 1602)
- Substantial change or use of any material from the bed, channel, or bank of, any river, stream, or lake (Fish and G. Code, § 1602)
- Deposition or disposing of debris, waste, or other deleterious materials where it may pass into any river, stream, or lake (Fish and G. Code, § 1602)
- Deposit of deleterious material into waters of the state (Fish and G. Code, §§ 5650 & 5652)

Recommendation: Early consultation with CDFW by BVES's environmental staff and early completion of all documentation necessary for CDFW's discretionary review of activities covered under the Plan.

Please note that BVES's service area lies within CDFW's Inland Desert Region and notifications and other permit documentation regarding Plan activities will need to be provided to staff in this region.

CONCLUSION

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on BVES's 2022 Wildfire Mitigation Plan to assist BVES in ensuring Plan activities comply with California Fish and Game Code.

Questions regarding this letter or further coordination should be directed to Jeanette Griffin, Senior Environmental Scientist (Specialist), at (916) 720-1233 or Jeanette.Griffin@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Jeff Drongesen
Chief, Habitat Conservation Planning Branch

Attachment

- 1) Select California Department of Fish and Wildlife Regulatory Requirements

ec: Julie Vance
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Select California Department of Fish and Wildlife Regulatory Requirements

Regulatory Requirements	Fish and Game Code	If Plan activities have the potential to result in:	Discretionary Approval or Permits Required:
CESA	§§ 2050-2115.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take of CESA listed species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If feasible, full avoidance measures can be implemented to remove potential for take • If full avoidance measures are not feasible, a CESA ITP or equivalent authorization is required • Potential implementation of some avoidance and minimization measures • No required timeline for CDFW review/issuance of permit • Subject to fees
Fully Protected Species	§§ 3511, 4700, 5050 and 5515	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take or possession of fully protected species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only allowed with coverage of NCCP • If no NCCP coverage, requires implementation of full avoidance and minimization measures to remove potential for take or possession
Birds	§§ 3503, 3503.5, 3513, 3800	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take of, possession of, or needlessly destroying the nest or eggs of any bird • Take of, possession of, or destroying any bird-of-prey or their nest or eggs • Take or possession of any migratory nongame bird • Take of any nongame bird 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires implementation of full avoidance and minimization measures to remove potential impacts to birds
LSA	§ 1600 et seq.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substantial diversion or obstruction of the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake • Substantial change or use of any material from the bed, channel, or bank of, any river, stream, or lake • Deposition or disposing of debris, waste, or other material containing crumbled, flaked, or ground pavement where it may pass into any river, stream, or lake 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires written notification of activity(ies) be submitted to CDFW • Timeline for CDFW review/issuance of permit: • CDFW review of notification: 30 days to determine whether it is complete • Once accepted as complete, CDFW is required to issue LSA within 60 days (if LSA is required for activities) • Subject to fees
Water Pollution	§ 5650 and 5652	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deposit of deleterious material into waters of the state 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires implementation of measures to remove potential for deposit of deleterious material into waters of the state.