



# County of Santa Cruz

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## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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**Meeting Date:** June 14, 2016  
**Date:** June 8, 2016  
**To:** The Board of Supervisors  
**From:** Bruce McPherson, Chair, John Leopold, First District Supervisor  
**Subject:** PG&E Tree Removal

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Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) has undertaken an ambitious Community Pipeline Safety Initiative to remove trees, vegetation and structures along its 6,750-mile high-pressure natural gas transmission pipeline in California to improve emergency access and safety.

In Santa Cruz County, the company proposes to initially remove trees along 60 miles of high-pressure gas transmission lines. Hundreds of trees in the unincorporated road rights-of-ways (ROW) in the county are proposed to be removed, with the highest concentration along the Graham Hill Road corridor between Santa Cruz and Felton where about 300 trees have been deemed “unacceptable.”

An undisclosed number of trees on private property are also proposed to be removed. PG&E is negotiating and entering into separate agreements with private property owners.

PG&E is confident that their internal analyses are sufficient justification for the proposed work. The company plans to start work without any outside environmental impact assessments and/or environmental impact reports made available for public comment.

While we appreciate that PG&E must have the ability to maintain, inspect and operate its system, and support measures to ensure pipeline safety, a number of our local constituents, have deep concerns about the negative impacts of PG&E’s actions concerns that are shared by other Bay Area communities. Community member’s concerns go far beyond the aesthetics of losing trees. Concerns have been raised regarding the impacts on water, road stability, water, air, wildlife, and long-term health and safety.

They also have questioned the science PG&E has used in concluding the trees are a

significant threat to the transmission lines and whether trees have ever inhibited access to transmission lines in any significant way during an emergency. Based on some research, tree roots perform a beneficial role along the transmission lines by stabilizing the pipeline especially in certain types of soils as well as along earthquake faults and surrounding areas.

We, as County Supervisors, have been asked for input regarding *mitigations* for the removed trees, either payment or replacement trees. However, a comprehensive assessment of all the trees on county property or within our ROW identified by PG&E to be removed has not taken place. Additionally, we would like the opportunity to review the analyses used by PG&E to identify trees for removal. Mitigation in the First and Fifth Districts alone, involves work in riparian corridors, a county park, and on federally protected Sandhill parkland habitat. We would like the opportunity to coordinate with all Districts to fully assess the impacts.

We propose that the project be put on hold here as well while the County creates a framework agreement with PG&E that makes sure our needs and our local and state environmental regulations are met.

The agreement should incorporate specific guidelines for potential removal and mitigations. We would also ask that all trees proposed for removal from the County right-of-way be reviewed by the County with the intent to minimize the number to those that present a clear and verified safety concern that cannot otherwise be mitigated.

It is therefore recommended that our Board direct the Public Works and Planning Department staff to draft guidelines for the review of trees in the county public right-of-way identified by PG&E for removal, and to direct County Counsel and the Department of Public Works to work with PG&E to draft an agreement with specific guidelines for the removal and mitigation of any trees in the public right-of-way.

**Submitted by:**

  
Frances Herbert, Chief of Staff 6/8/2016