



**BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF
THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA**

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Application Of Southern California
Gas Company (U 904 G) Proposing
Woody Biomass Pilot Project

Application 25-10-008

**BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA OPENING BRIEF ON THE
APPLICATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY (U 904 G)
PROPOSING WOODY BIOMASS PILOT PROJECT**

DATED: August 28, 2026

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
II.	BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA.....	1
III.	SOCALGAS’ PILOT PROJECT WILL DEMONSTRATE SIGNIFICANT GREENHOUSE GAS AND SHORT-LIVED CLIMATE POLLUTANT REDUCTIONS.....	2
	A. The Pilot Project Will Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Emissions, which is the Most Urgent Climate Solution and Required by State Law.....	2
	B. The Pilot Project Will Help California to Achieve Carbon Neutrality, as Required by State Law.....	4
IV.	SOCALGAS’ PILOT PROJECT WILL ADVANCE ESJ GOALS AND OTHER IMPORTANT STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS.....	5
	A. The Pilot Project Will Meet ESJ Goal 2 by Reducing Air Pollution	5
	B. The Pilot Project Will Provide a Valuable Model for Forest Waste Utilization, Helping to Mitigate Wildfires and Save Ratepayers Money.....	6
	C. SoCalGas’ Pilot Project Will Further ESJ Goals 2 and 5 by Providing Investment and High Road Jobs in ESJ Communities	7
V.	SIERRA CLUB’S TESTIMONY IGNORES THE STATE’S EXPERT AGENCIES’ FINDINGS THAT WASTE BIOMASS CONVERSION PROVIDES SIGNIFICANT EMISSIONS REDUCTION BENEFITS.....	8
VI.	SIERRA CLUB COMMENTS ABOUT THE GREENHOUSE GAS BENEFITS OF BIOENERGY ARE INCONSISTENT AND AGENDA-DRIVEN RATHER THAN SCIENCE BASED.....	10
VII.	CONCLUSION.....	11

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Legislation

AB 1900 (Gatto), Statutes of 2012, Chapter 602.....	1
SB 1440 (Hueso), Statutes of 2018, Chapter 739.....	1, 2, 10
AB 3163 (Salas), Statutes of 2020, Chapter 358.....	2
SB 1383 (Lara), Statutes of 2016, Chapter 395.....	2, 3, 4
AB 1279 (Muratsuchi), Statutes of 2022, Chapter 337	4

Regulations

Health and Safety Code section 39730.5	3
Health and Safety Code section 39730.8	3

Executive Orders

Executive Order N-5-24 (Oct. 30,2024).....	1
--	---

State Climate, Air Quality, Jobs and Resource Plans

<i>California Forest Carbon Plan</i> , adopted by CalEPA and CNRA	3
<i>Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy</i> , adopted by CARB	3, 5, 7
<i>CAPCOA Biomass Policy Statement</i>	3
<i>San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Burning Assessment</i>	5
<i>Joint Institute Recommendations to Expand Wood and Biomass Utilization</i> <i>In California</i> , Board of Forestry (2020)	7
<i>California Jobs First Plan</i> (Governor Newsom)	7, 8

CPUC Rules of Practice and Procedure	1
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I. INTRODUCTION

The Bioenergy Association of California (BAC) submits this Opening Brief in accordance with the Administrative Law Judge's Ruling of July 21, 2026 and the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure. BAC strongly supports SoCalGas' Application for a woody biomass pilot project as it will help meet the state's climate change, air quality, sustainable agriculture, jobs and economic goals. The project will also benefit ratepayers by demonstrating a biomass utilization technology that is needed to mitigate wildfires, which are now the biggest cause of increasing electricity rates in California.¹

II. BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA

BAC represents about 85 members that are converting organic waste to energy to meet the state's clean energy, climate change, wildfire reduction, landfill reduction, and circular economy goals. BAC's public sector members include cities and counties, Tribes, air quality and environmental agencies, waste and wastewater agencies, public research institutions, environmental and community groups, and a publicly owned utility. BAC's private sector members include energy and technology companies, waste haulers, agriculture and food processing companies, investors and consulting firms, and an investor-owned utility.

BAC has been actively involved in pipeline biomethane issues since the association's founding in 2012. BAC members and staff participated in the development and enactment of AB 1900 (Gatto, 2012),² the legislation that created Rulemaking 13-02-008, and the development and implementation of SB 1440 (Hueso, 2018),³ which led to the Commission's adoption of a pipeline biomethane procurement program. BAC was

¹ See, e.g., "CPUC Response to Executive Order N-5-24" issued by the CPUC on February 18, 2025; <https://ls.berkeley.edu/news/why-california%E2%80%99s-electricity-bills-keep-climbing>; <https://www.publicadvocates.cpuc.ca.gov/press-room/reports-and-analyses/wildfire-cost-increases-of-california-electric-ious>; <https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2026-04-10/california-utility-bills-are-20-higher-due-to-wildfires-pacific-gas-edison>.

² AB 1900 (Gatto), Statutes of 2012, Chapter 602.

³ SB 1440 (Hueso), Statutes of 2018, Chapter 739.

also the sponsor of AB 3163 (Salas, 2020),⁴ the legislation that expanded eligible pipeline biomethane to include biomethane produced from waste biomass.

BAC has several members that are developing or operating pipeline biomethane projects in California, including members that are interested in developing woody biomass to pipeline biomethane projects. One of BAC's members - West Biofuels, LLC - is the project developer that SoCalGas chose to develop the pilot project that is the subject of this Application. Other BAC members are considering developing biomass to pipeline biomethane projects as well and so are very interested in the outcome of this proceeding to determine which projects will be considered and approved.

III. SOCALGAS' PILOT PROJECT WILL DEMONSTRATE SIGNIFICANT GREENHOUSE GAS AND SHORT-LIVED CLIMATE POLLUTANT REDUCTIONS.

BAC cited numerous studies by expert state agencies and research institutions indicating that SoCalGas' proposed pilot project will provide significant reductions in greenhouse gas and short-lived climate pollutant emissions.⁵ SoCalGas' Corrected Testimony also shows that the pilot project will provide significant greenhouse gas reductions.⁶

A. The Pilot Project Will Reduce Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Emissions, Which is The Most Urgent Climate Solution and Required by State Law.

SoCalGas' proposed pilot project will further the requirements of SB 1440 and SB 1383⁷ by reducing emissions of the climate super pollutants methane and black carbon, also known as Short-Lived Climate Pollutants. SB 1383 requires a 40 percent reduction in

⁴ AB 3163 (Salas), Statutes of 2020, Chapter 358.

⁵ TESTIMONY OF JULIA A. LEVIN REGARDING THE APPLICATION OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY (U 904 G) PROPOSING WOODY BIOMASS PILOT PROJECT, filed March 9, 2026 in A.25-10-008, at pages 2-3. [Hereinafter, "BAC's Opening Testimony"]

⁶ CORRECTED REVISED PREPARED DIRECT TESTIMONY OF JAMES LUCAS AND DR. MATTHEW D. SUMMERS ON BEHALF OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA GAS COMPANY (SELECTION OF PILOT PROJECT), Attachment One, Tables 1 and 3. [Hereinafter, "SoCalGas' Corrected Testimony"]

⁷ SB 1383 (Lara), Statutes of 2016, Chapter 395.

methane and a 50 percent reduction in black carbon by 2030.⁸ SB 1383 also calls on state agencies to adopt policies and incentives to “significantly increase the sustainable production and use of renewable gas, including biomethane and biogas.”⁹ And SB 1383 calls specifically on the Commission to consider adopting additional policies to “support the development and use in the state of renewable gas, including biomethane and biogas, that reduce short-lived climate pollutants in the state.”¹⁰ As the Legislature said in SB 1383, reducing these climate super pollutants will “have an immediate beneficial impact on climate change and on public health.”¹¹

The proposed pilot project will reduce these emissions by converting woody biomass to biomethane instead of air curtain burning or pile and decay of that agricultural waste.¹² According to the California Environmental Protection Agency, converting agricultural or forest waste to bioenergy cuts both black carbon and methane emissions by 98 percent compared to pile burning or wildfires.¹³ Converting woody biomass to energy also cuts harmful air pollutants such as particulate matter, carbon monoxide and NOx significantly as well.¹⁴

The Air Board also underscored the importance of converting organic waste to pipeline biomethane in the *California Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy*:

“The State's organic waste should be put to beneficial use, such as for . . . pipeline-injected renewable natural gas. . . important environmental, health, and economic benefits may be most realized in disadvantaged communities by prioritizing pipeline injection of renewable natural gas.”¹⁵

⁸ Health and Safety Code section 39730.5.

⁹ Health and Safety Code section 39730.8(c).

¹⁰ Health and Safety Code section 39730.8(d).

¹¹ SB 1383 (Lara, 2016), Section 1(a)(4).

¹² Id.

¹³ *California Forest Carbon Plan*, adopted by CalEPA, the California Natural Resources Agency and CalFire in 2018, at pages 130 and 135.

¹⁴ Id. and the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) *Biomass Policy Statement* at page 1.

¹⁵ California Air Resources Board, *Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy*, adopted March 2017 at pages 3 and 125.

SoCalGas' woody biomass pilot project will reduce methane and black carbon emissions from air curtain burning or pile and decay of agricultural residues, thereby furthering the requirements of SB 1383 and other climate laws.

B. The Pilot Project Will Help California to Achieve Carbon Neutrality, as Required by State Law.

BAC's opening testimony cited studies by CARB and Lawrence Livermore National Lab showing that the pilot project will likely provide carbon negative emissions,¹⁶ which will help to achieve the statutory goal of reaching carbon neutrality by mid-century.¹⁷ The California Air Resources Board (CARB) and climate scientists agree that achieving carbon neutrality will require significant generation of carbon negative emissions to offset climate pollution that cannot be eliminated.¹⁸ Both CARB and Lawrence Livermore National Lab have also concluded that bioenergy with carbon capture and sequestration (BECCS) provides the single largest potential for carbon negative emissions in California.¹⁹ In fact, Lawrence Livermore National Lab found that BECCS could provide two-thirds of all the carbon negative emissions needed for California to meet the goal of carbon neutrality and that most of that BECCS would be generated from forest and agricultural waste, as proposed in the SoCalGas pilot project.²⁰

If approved, SoCalGas' pilot project (BECCS use case scenario) can generate carbon negative emissions needed to reach carbon neutrality and will provide an important model for other projects to learn from and replicate.²¹

¹⁶ BAC's Opening Testimony, at page 4.

¹⁷ AB 1279 (Muratsuchi, 2022) established a statewide goal of carbon neutrality by 2045.

¹⁸ See, CARB's *2022 Climate Change Scoping Plan for Carbon Neutrality*; Lawrence Livermore National Lab, *Getting to Neutral – Options for Negative Carbon Emissions in California*, January 2020. LLNL-PRES-795982.

¹⁹ Id.

²⁰ LLNL report, above, at page 2.

²¹ SoCalGas' Corrected Testimony, Attachment One, Tables 1 and 3.

IV. SOCALGAS' PILOT PROJECT WILL ADVANCE ESJ GOALS AND OTHER IMPORTANT STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS.

SoCalGas' proposed pilot project will further the Commission's Environmental and Social Justice (ESJ) goals, as well as other important state laws and policies, including the following.

A. The Pilot Project Will Meet ESJ Goal 2 by Reducing Air Pollution in Kern County.

BAC provided several studies by CARB and local air districts showing that the pilot project will provide significant reductions in air pollution.²² As noted above, CARB has determined that "important environmental, health, and economic benefits may be most realized in disadvantaged communities by prioritizing pipeline injection of renewable natural gas."²³ SoCalGas' testimony also showed that the pilot project will provide significant reductions in particulate matter (PM10), carbon monoxide, and SOx emissions,²⁴ all of which benefit public health in ESJ communities.

In 2021, CARB adopted a plan to phase out open burning of agricultural waste in the San Joaquin Valley.²⁵ That plan calls specifically for increased bioenergy production as a beneficial alternative to open burning.²⁶ As CARB found, converting agricultural waste to gaseous fuels can help the state meet its climate goals.²⁷ CARB concluded that:

"a renewable fuel production facility that utilizes agricultural residue that would otherwise be open burned can help reduce greenhouse gas and criteria pollutant emissions, waste, and fossil fuel dependence, while supporting local economies."²⁸

Despite the ban on open burning, the San Joaquin Valley Air District notes that "there are limited exceptions and other materials for which agricultural burning will continue to

²² BAC's Opening Testimony at pages 4-5.

²³ California Air Resources Board, *Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy*, adopted March 2017 at pages 3 and 125.

²⁴ SoCalGas' Corrected Testimony, Attachment One, Tables 1 and 2.

²⁵ California Air Resources Board, *San Joaquin Valley Agricultural Burning Assessment*, adopted February 25, 2021.

²⁶ *Id.* at pages 9-10.

²⁷ *Id.* at page 10.

²⁸ *Id.*

be permitted.”²⁹ Those exceptions include some types of orchard pruning and removal, rice straw, disease prevention, and several other types of agricultural materials.³⁰ In other words, some amount of open burning continues and beneficial alternatives to open burning are still needed. The SoCalGas pilot project will demonstrate a beneficial alternative to those continued burns and for other agricultural regions that continue to allow open burning more broadly.

In addition to providing a beneficial alternative to open burning, the SoCalGas pilot project will also reduce pile and decay of agricultural waste, which emits methane, a climate super pollutant and a precursor to smog that harms public health.³¹

B. The Pilot Project Will Provide a Valuable Model for Forest Waste Utilization, Helping to Mitigate Wildfires and Save Ratepayers Money.

Although SoCalGas’ proposed pilot project is focused on agricultural residues, it will also benefit ratepayers by demonstrating the feasibility and benefits of other types of woody biomass conversion, such as forest waste removed for wildfire mitigation, to pipeline biomethane. As CPUC President John Reynolds stated recently, “Wildfire is the enemy when it comes to electricity affordability.”³² The Secretary of the California Natural Resources Agency in a recent letter to President Reynolds and seven other state agencies also called for more “biomass utilization as a key strategy to reduce catastrophic wildfire risks across California.”³³ Secretary Crowfoot continued:

“Rural communities, wildfire safety organizations, and the forestry sector are joining forces to explore new pathways for biomass. It is important that our agencies engage with this coalition of groups and signal support for finding solutions. . . . Over the past decade, our agencies and partners across our state have come together in creative ways to confront our catastrophic wildfire risk. . . enabling biomass utilization to continue is one more important piece of this puzzle.”³⁴

²⁹ See, <https://www.valleyair.org/agriculture/agricultural-burning>.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ <https://www.ccacoalition.org/short-lived-climate-pollutants/methane>.

³² Statement of CPUC President John Reynolds at the California Summit held in Sacramento on August 10, 2026 and cited in Politico California on August 11, 2026.

³³ Letter from CNRA Secretary Wade Crowfoot to CPUC President Reynolds and others, dated May 6, 2026, at page 1.

³⁴ Id. at page 2.

Converting forest residues to pipeline biomethane is a wildfire mitigation strategy that will save ratepayers funding by reducing the costs of wildfires. California's *Forest Carbon Plan* and the Board of Forestry's *Wood Utilization Plan* both call for increased bioenergy from forest waste as a way to mitigate wildfires and reduce pile burning of forest residues (as well as agricultural residues).³⁵ The Board of Forestry's *Wood Utilization Plan* calls specifically on the Commission to take steps to facilitate conversion of forest waste to pipeline biomethane.³⁶

SoCalGas' pilot project will demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of woody biomass conversion to pipeline biomethane, which will help provide outlets for forest waste as well as agricultural wood waste.

C. SoCalGas' Pilot Project Will Further ESJ Goals 2 and 5 by Providing Investment and High Road Jobs in ESJ Communities.

BAC cited several studies in opening testimony showing that organic waste to energy projects generate significant numbers of high skill, high pay and permanent jobs, which furthers the ESJ goals of creating good jobs and high road career paths.³⁷ As BAC cited in its opening testimony, CARB has found that "Building infrastructure to better manage organic waste streams could lead to billions of dollars of investment and thousands of jobs in the State."³⁸

SoCalGas' pilot project will also further the goals of the Governor's *California Jobs First* initiative. The Governor's *California Jobs First* initiative is focused on increasing good jobs that support a circular economy, build strong families and communities, and further the state's climate and clean energy goals. The statewide plan is based on 13 regional plans,³⁹ at least six of which call for increased bioenergy, including the plans for the Central San Joaquin Valley (p. 28), North State (p. 16), Eastern Sierra Nevada (p. 100),

³⁵ *Joint Institute Recommendations to Expand Wood and Biomass Utilization in California*, adopted by the California Board of Forestry in November 2020, at pages 14-19.

³⁶ *Id.* at pages 16-17.

³⁷ BAC's Opening Testimony, at pages 5-6 and 12.

³⁸ BAC's Opening Testimony at page 6, citing *Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy*, adopted by the California Air Resources Board, March 2017, at pages 28 and 34.

³⁹ <https://jobsfirst.ca.gov/>

Redwood Coast (p. 62) Kern County (p. 25), and North San Joaquin Valley (pages 36 and 39). Notably, these are the regions that represent most of California's forested and agricultural regions, which desperately need good paying, high skill and permanent jobs.

According to recent reports by the Clean Air Task Force and Rand Corporation, projects that convert organic waste to energy – like the SoCalGas pilot project – provide more jobs and a higher proportion of permanent, high paying jobs than other forms of clean energy.⁴⁰ These are the sorts of jobs promoted in the Governor's *California Jobs First* plan because they are high road jobs that provide long-term support for families and communities, especially rural communities that have fewer options for economic development.

V. SIERRA CLUB'S TESTIMONY IGNORES THE STATE'S EXPERT AGENCIES' FINDINGS THAT WASTE BIOMASS CONVERSION PROVIDES SIGNIFICANT EMISSIONS REDUCTION BENEFITS.

BAC provided extensive data in its opening testimony on the climate and air quality benefits of converting agricultural waste to energy.⁴¹ That included studies by the California Environmental Protection Agency and the California Natural Resources Agency finding that conversion of agricultural waste to energy cuts particulate matter, methane and carbon monoxide by 98 percent compared to open burning of that waste.⁴² BAC also submitted data from the state association of local air districts finding that conversion of waste biomass to energy cuts smog-forming pollution (NOx) by 40 to 70 percent compared to open burning, and that is when the bioenergy project uses direct combustion.⁴³ BAC submitted data from the U.S. Department of Energy and other independent sources showing that bioenergy projects that use gasification or

⁴⁰ Clean Air Task Force: *An Exploration of Options and Opportunities for the San Joaquin Valley Clean Energy Future*, issued in November 2024; Kalra, et al, *Informing Clean Energy Planning in California's San Joaquin Valley*, issued by the Rand Corporation in November 2024.

⁴¹ BAC's Opening Testimony, at pages 2-5.

⁴² *Id.* at page 4.

⁴³ *Id.*

pyrolysis – as SoCalGas’ pilot project would - provide even greater emissions reductions due to their higher efficiency and more direct emissions controls.⁴⁴

In 2025, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (where this pilot project would be based) and three other local air districts wrote to the Commission to urge the Commission to support bioenergy from agricultural and forest waste.⁴⁵ The Air Districts explained why bioenergy is so critical to protect air quality and the climate:

“our areas are under significant stress to reduce smoke from agricultural burning due to its effects on public health, including a state-mandated phase-out of agricultural open burning in the San Joaquin Valley. . . .As California . . . works to maintain a vibrant agricultural sector that serves as the nation’s food basket, more solutions for dealing with woody materials are critically needed . . . to prevent stockpiling, landfill methane emissions, or renewed pressure to burn. . . . Converting these materials into renewable energy provides a practical, community-based solution to provide numerous benefits through the productive use of waste that would otherwise contribute to significant air quality and climate impacts.”⁴⁶

BAC also provided data from the California Air Resources Board, Clean Air Task Force and Rand Corporation on the jobs and economic development benefits of bioenergy projects, which relates directly to the pilot project’s impacts on the local economy and the Commission’s Environmental and Social Justice (ESJ) goals.⁴⁷ This includes the Air Board’s finding that bioenergy can stimulate billions of dollars of new investment and thousands of new jobs (ESJ Goals 2 and 7).⁴⁸

Sierra Club’s testimony does not address any of these findings from expert state agencies, local air districts, national labs, or air quality organizations. Sierra Club does not explain why these studies and conclusions are not applicable to the proposed pilot project even though most of the citations are to official state plans and studies from

⁴⁴ Id. at pages 4-5.

⁴⁵ Letter from the directors of the San Joaquin Valley, Bay Area, Sacramento Metropolitan and Placer County Air Districts to CPUC President Reynolds and Commissioners Baker, Douglas, Houck and Reynolds, dated November 15, 2025. The Letter was submitted as an attachment to the APPLICATION FOR REHEARING OF THE AGRICULTURAL ENERGY CONSUMERS ASSOCIATION, BIOENERGY ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA, CALIFORNIA ASSOCIATION OF SANITATION AGENCIES, AND THE CALIFORNIA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION, filed and served in R.18-07-003 on February 10, 2026.

⁴⁶ Id. at pages 1-3.

⁴⁷ BAC’s Opening Testimony, at page 5.

⁴⁸ Id. at pages 5-6.

independent, expert agencies. On the contrary, Sierra Club's testimony completely ignores the state's expert agencies such as CARB and CalEPA on the science of bioenergy and how it affects climate change and air quality.

VI. SIERRA CLUB COMMENTS ABOUT THE GREENHOUSE GAS BENEFITS OF BIOENERGY ARE INCONSISTENT AND AGENDA-DRIVEN RATHER THAN SCIENCE-BASED.

In addition to ignoring peer-reviewed and expert agency studies, Sierra Club's statements about biomethane have been inconsistent and contradictory over the past few years, demonstrating bias rather than scientific consistency. For example, in the Commission's Self-Generation Incentive Program proceeding, Sierra Club pointed specifically to pipeline biomethane procurement as having "far superior GHG benefits."⁴⁹ Sierra Club stated that:

"other avenues exist for waste biofuel to be utilized, including the Low Carbon Fuel Standard, the Bioenergy Market Adjusting Tariff ("BioMAT"), or future procurement that may be authorized under SB 1440. These programs . . . have far superior GHG benefits by more fully displacing fossil fuels."⁵⁰ [emphasis added]

Despite stating that both the BioMAT and the SB 1440 procurement programs would provide "far superior GHG benefits," Sierra Club has also argued that a model developed to calculate GHG emissions from BioMAT projects – regardless of the specific results of that model – "should be used as a barrier to entry" in the BioMAT (small-scale bioenergy) program.⁵¹ In other words, Sierra Club did not request the development of a GHG model to determine whether bioenergy projects provide GHG

⁴⁹ SIERRA CLUB REPLY COMMENTS ON ASSIGNED COMMISSIONER'S RULING REQUESTING COMMENT, filed March 29, 2021 in R.20-05-012, at page 2.

⁵⁰ Id.

⁵¹ COMMENTS OF CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY AND SIERRA CLUB ON PROPOSED DECISION OF ALJs ATAMTURK AND LAKHANPAL ON ORDER INSTITUTING RULEMAKING TO CONTINUE IMPLEMENTATION AND ADMINISTRATION, AND CONSIDER FURTHER DEVELOPMENT, OF CALIFORNIA RENEWABLES PORTFOLIO STANDARD PROGRAM, filed July 24, 2020 in R.18-07-003, at page 2.

reductions; Sierra Club sought development of a GHG model to stop projects from participating altogether.

Sierra Club's statements about the GHG benefits of bioenergy and biofuels are inconsistent and contradictory. The statement about using a GHG model as a barrier to entry also shows that no matter what lifecycle models show, Sierra Club seeks to prevent bioenergy or biofuels procurement. This is what is known as agenda driven advocacy, where the methodology, choice of data highlighted, or conclusions are intentionally shaped to support a preferred outcome.⁵²

VII. CONCLUSION

BAC strongly supports SoCalGas' Application for a woody biomass pilot project and urges the Commission to approve its Application. California's expert health, climate and resource agencies have all called for increased conversion of woody biomass to pipeline biomethane and other forms of energy to meet the state's climate change, air quality, and economic development goals, which the pilot project will do. Moving forward with the pilot project is essential to demonstrate the use of gasification to convert waste biomass to pipeline biomethane. SoCalGas' pilot project will benefit ratepayers by demonstrating a technology that can help to mitigate wildfire costs. The pilot project will benefit all Californians by reducing air and climate pollution and creating good jobs and economic development in rural regions of the state.

DATED: August 28, 2026

Respectfully submitted,

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⁵² Peery, M.Z., G.M. Jones, R.J. Gutiérrez, S.M. Redpath, A.B. Franklin, D. Simberloff, M.G. Turner, V.C. Radeloff, and G.C. White. 2019. The conundrum of agenda-driven science in conservation. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 17(2):80-82. doi: 10.1002/fee.2006.

VERIFICATION

I am a representative of the non-profit organization herein, and am authorized to make this verification on its behalf. The statements in the foregoing document are true of my own knowledge, except as to matters which are therein stated on information or belief, and, as to those matters, I believe them to be true.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed this 28th day of August, 2026 in Kensington, California.

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