

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

**Communications Division
Broadband, Video and Market Branch**

**RESOLUTION T-17809
January 25, 2024**

R E S O L U T I O N

Resolution T-17809: Authorizes the release of California Advanced Services Fund grant monies to Plumas Sierra Telecom (U-7218-C) to construct the Long Valley-Spring Garden Project and finds the Long Valley-Spring Garden Project categorically exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review.

I. SUMMARY

This Resolution authorizes the release of California Advanced Services Fund (CASF) grant funding approved by Resolution T-17750 to Plumas Sierra Telecom (U-7218-C) to construct the Long Valley-Spring Garden (Long Valley) Project. This Resolution also finds that the Long Valley Project is categorically exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review. The project will extend high-speed Internet service to enable broadband access at speeds of up to 1 Gbps download and 1 Gbps upload to 31 CASF-eligible households over an area of approximately 1.37 square miles in the towns of Cromberg, Spring Garden, and the Greenhorn Ranch community areas of Plumas County.

II. BACKGROUND

On December 17, 2021, the California Public Utilities Commission ("Commission") adopted Resolution T-17750, conditionally authorizing a CASF grant of up to \$5,016,256 to Plumas Sierra Telecom (PST) to construct the Long Valley Project, subject to the Commission's completion of CEQA review. The grant represented 100 percent of the total estimated project cost.

III. ENVIRONMENTAL COMPLIANCE DISCUSSION

The Commission's decision in Resolution T-17750 to conditionally grant funding under the CASF triggered the requirement that the Commission act as the lead agency for environmental review pursuant to CEQA. Consistent with the Commission's requirements, PST provided a Proponent's Environmental Assessment (PEA) to the Energy Division's Infrastructure Permitting and CEQA Unit in April 2022. In August 2023, PST provided the Energy Division with a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) determination from the U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service (USDA/USFS) that approved the amendment to the special use permit BEC1121 to allow PST to attach new all-dielectric-self-supporting (ADSS)¹ fiber optic cable on previously permitted PST-owned utility poles that are located on land owned by the USFS.² Additionally, the determination noted that the pole attachments and other work are categorically excluded from required analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA).³

After reviewing the information contained in the PEA and the NEPA determination, the Commission's CEQA Unit determined that the project is categorically exempt from CEQA.

The Long Valley Project includes 54.5 miles of overhead ADSS fiber to be deployed on existing overhead electrical pole structures provided by PST. The aerial portion will follow existing powerline corridors in federal and state/county/city right of ways and easements including approximately 5.8 miles of new aerial fiber optic cable on USFS lands utilizing existing access roads. Approximately 0.27 miles of new underground fiber optic will be installed in existing conduit on USFS lands. Approximately 1.3 miles of underground conduit will be installed in a Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative right-of-way easement on previously disturbed soil.

Trenching and backfilling will comply with PST's and local guidelines and may be done by machinery or hand, depending on local conditions, economics, and available equipment. Following the installation of conduit and cable, the site will be returned to its original condition. Approximately 1.3 miles of ground will be disturbed for this project. PST will use existing permanent utility easements (PUE) or rights of way for the path of underground fiber distribution for this project.

As noted previously, approximately 5.8 miles of the fiber will be installed on USFS land; the USFS has issued a categorical exclusion from NEPA for that portion of the project.

¹ All-dielectric cable is composed of non-metallic materials and has no conducting properties; the insulating material resists the passage of electric current through the cable. The "self-supporting refers" to the ability of the reinforcing member of the optical cable to withstand its own weight and external load.

² "Decision Memo PSREC Amendment to Special Use Permit BEC1121" by USDA Forest Service, dated July 7, 2023

³ The applicable category of actions is identified in the Code of Federal Regulations as 36 CFR 220.6(e)(12): "Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor."

Based on the information provided, the project meets the criteria for the CEQA categorical exemptions under 14 C.C.R. §§ 15301⁴ (Existing Facilities) and 15304⁵ (Minor Alterations to Land).

IV. RELEASE OF CASF FUNDS

Resolution T- 17750 awarded PST a CASF grant of up to \$5,016,256 to construct the Long Valley Project, contingent on compliance with applicable environmental requirements.⁶ Because the project is CEQA-exempt as discussed in the prior section, the Commission authorizes CASF grant funds to be released for the construction of the Long Valley Project in accordance with the scope and budget specifications provided in Resolution T-17750. PST is required to comply with all provisions in Resolution T-17750.

V. SAFETY IMPACT

The Long Valley Project is in a remote area of Plumas County designated as a Tier 2 Fire Threat District. Telephone and broadband access to emergency services is essential in these remote areas, where the threat of fire, harsh weather conditions, and other disasters can have severe impacts. During emergencies, local communication networks are crucial for communications among first responders, residents, and other rescue organizations.

The Long Valley Project is greatly supported by the community to increase opportunities for education, training, employment, and economic workforce development. A broad range of elected officials, educational institutions and community stakeholders including members of the California State Legislature, Plumas County Board of Supervisors, and representatives from local boards of education, public health agencies and chambers of commerce sent letters of support for the project.

VI. COMMENTS ON DRAFT RESOLUTION

1. In compliance with Public Utilities Code § 311(g), a notice letter was emailed on December 22, 2023, informing all parties on the CASF Distribution List of the availability of the draft of this Resolution for public comments at the Commission's

⁴ Class 1 of categorically exempted projects consists of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. ([Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 14, § 15301 - Existing Facilities | State Regulations | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute \(cornell.edu\)](#))

⁵ [Cal. Code Regs. Tit. 14, § 15304 - Minor Alterations to Land | State Regulations | US Law | LII / Legal Information Institute \(cornell.edu\)](#)

⁶ Resolution T-17750, Section V, issued December 17, 2021, at <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M432/K519/432519307.PDF>

documents website at <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/documents/>. This letter also informed parties that the final conformed Resolution adopted by the Commission will be posted and available on the same website. The Commission received no public comments.

VII. FINDINGS

2. Resolution T-17550 (issued December 17, 2021) conditionally authorized a CASF grant of up to \$5,016,256 to Plumas Sierra Telecom (PST) to construct the Long Valley-Spring Garden (Long Valley) Project, subject to the Commission's completion of CEQA review.
3. The Commission is the lead agency under CEQA for environmental review of the Long Valley Project.
4. The applicant provided the required PEA in April 2022, and a final NEPA determination from the U.S. Forest Service in August 2023.
5. Based on the information contained in the PEA and the NEPA determination, the project is categorically exempt from CEQA, consistent with 14 C.C.R. §§ 15301 – Existing Facilities and 15304 – Minor Alterations to Land.
6. With the adoption of this Resolution, PST has satisfied the environmental conditions of Resolution T-17550 required to release funds for the construction of the Long Valley project.⁷
7. PST is required to comply with all provisions in Resolutions T-17550.
8. A notice letter was e-mailed on December 22, 2023, informing all parties on the CASF distribution list of the availability of the draft of this Resolution for public comments on the Commission's website <http://www.cpuc.ca.gov/documents/>. This letter also informed parties that the final confirmed Resolution adopted by the Commission will be posted and available on this same website.
9. The Commission received no public comments.

⁷ Resolution T-17750, Section V, issued December 17, 2021, at <https://docs.cpuc.ca.gov/PublishedDocs/Published/G000/M432/K519/432519307.PDF>.

THEREFORE, IT IS ORDERED THAT:

1. The Commission shall authorize up to \$5,016,256 in CASF grant funds to be released for the construction of the Long Valley Project in accordance with the scope and budget specifications and payment guidelines provided in Resolution T-17550.
2. PST shall comply with all guidelines, requirements, and conditions associated with the CASF funds award as specified in Resolutions T-17550.
3. In the event that PST fails to complete the project in accordance with the terms of approval granted by the Commission in Resolution T-17550, PST must reimburse some or all of the CASF funds that it has received.

This Resolution is effective today.

I hereby certify that this Resolution was adopted by the Public Utilities Commission at its regular meeting on January 25, 2024. The following Commissioners approved it:

/s/RACHEL PETERSON

Rachel Peterson
Executive Director

ALICE REYNOLDS
President
GENEVIEVE SHIROMA
DARCIE L. HOUCK
JOHN REYNOLDS
KAREN DOUGLAS
Commissioners