

(b)(2) of this section (unless extended within this time period by a resource agency, Indian tribe, or members of the public for an additional 60 days by sending written notice to the applicant and the Director of the Office of Energy Projects within the first 60 day period, with an explanation of the basis for the extension), each interested resource agency, Indian tribe, and members of the public must provide a potential applicant with written comments:

(i) Identifying its determination of necessary studies to be performed or the information to be provided by the potential applicant;

(ii) Identifying the basis for its determination;

(iii) Discussing its understanding of the resource issues and its goals and objectives for these resources;

(iv) Explaining why each study methodology recommended by it is more appropriate than any other available methodology alternatives, including those identified by the potential applicant pursuant to paragraph (b)(2)(vii) of this section;

(v) Documenting that the use of each study methodology recommended by it is a generally accepted practice; and

(vi) Explaining how the studies and information requested will be useful to the agency, Indian tribe, or member of the public in furthering its resource goals and objectives that are affected by the proposed project.

(6) *Study dispute resolution.* (i) If a potential applicant and a resource agency, Indian tribe, or member of the public disagree as to any matter arising during the first stage of consultation or as to the need to conduct a study or gather information referenced in paragraph (c)(2) of this section, the potential applicant or resource agency, Indian tribe, or member of the public may refer the dispute in writing to the Director of the Office of Energy Projects (Director) for resolution.

(ii) At the same time as the request for dispute resolution is submitted to the Director, the entity referring the dispute must serve a copy of its written request for resolution on the disagreeing party and any affected resource, Indian tribe, or member of the public, which may submit to the Director a written response to the referral within 15 days of the referral's submittal to the Director.

(iii) Written referrals to the Director and written responses thereto pursuant to paragraphs (b)(6)(i) or (b)(6)(ii) of this section must be filed with the Commission in accordance with the Commission's Rules of Practice and Procedure, and must indicate that they

are for the attention of the Director pursuant to § 4.38(b)(6).

(iv) The Director will resolve the disputes by an order directing the potential applicant to gather such information or conduct such study or studies as, in the Director's view, is reasonable and necessary.

(v) If a resource agency, Indian tribe, or member of the public fails to refer a dispute regarding a request for a potential applicant to obtain information or conduct studies (other than a dispute regarding the information specified in paragraph (b)(1) or (b)(2) of this section), the Commission will not entertain the dispute following the filing of the license application.

(vi) If a potential applicant fails to obtain information or conduct a study as required by the Director pursuant to paragraph (b)(6)(iv) of this section, its application will be considered deficient.

(7) The first stage of consultation ends when all participating agencies, Indian tribes, and members of the public provide the written comments required under paragraph (b)(5) of this section or 60 days after the joint meeting held under paragraph (b)(3) of this section, whichever occurs first, unless a resource agency or Indian tribe timely notifies the applicant and the Director of Energy Projects of its need for more time to provide written comments under paragraph (b)(5) of this section, in which case the first stage of consultation ends when all participating agencies and Indian tribes provide the written comments required under paragraph (b)(5) of this section or 120 days after the joint meeting held under paragraph (b)(5) of this section, whichever occurs first.

(c) *Second stage of consultation.* (1) Unless determined to be unnecessary by the Director pursuant to paragraph (b)(6) of this section, a potential applicant must diligently conduct all reasonable studies and obtain all reasonable information requested by resource agencies, Indian tribes, and members of the public under paragraph (b) of this section to which the potential applicant has agreed. The applicant shall also obtain any data and conduct any studies required by the Commission pursuant to the dispute resolution procedures of paragraph (b)(6) of this section. These studies must be completed and the information obtained:

(i) Prior to filing the application, if the results:

(A) Would influence the financial (e.g., instream flow study) or technical feasibility of a project (e.g., study of potential mass soil movement); or

(B) Are needed to determine the design or location of project features,

reasonable alternatives to the project, the impact of the project on important natural or cultural resources (e.g., resource surveys), or suitable mitigation or enhancement measures, or to minimize impact on significant resources (e.g., wild and scenic river, anadromous fish, endangered species, caribou migration routes);

(ii) After filing the application but before issuance of a license or exemption, if the applicant otherwise complied with the provisions of paragraph (b)(1) or (b)(2) of this section, as applicable, and the study or information gathering would take longer to conduct and evaluate than the time between the conclusion of the first stage of consultation and the expiration of the applicant's preliminary permit or the application filing deadline set by the Commission;

(iii) After a new license or exemption is issued, if the studies can be conducted or the information obtained only after construction or operation of the proposed facilities, would determine the success of protection, mitigation, or enhancement measures (e.g., post-construction monitoring studies), or would be used to refine project operation or modify project facilities.

(2) If, after the end of the first stage of consultation as defined in paragraph (b)(7) of this section, a resource agency, Indian tribe, or member of the public requests that the potential applicant conduct a study or gather information not previously identified and specifies the basis and reasoning for its request, under paragraphs (b)(5)(i)–(vi) of this section, the potential applicant must promptly initiate the study or gather the information, or explain to the requesting entity why it believes the request is not reasonable or necessary. If the potential applicant declines to obtain the information or conduct the study, any resource agency, Indian tribe, or consulted member of the public may refer any such request to the Director of the Office of Energy Projects for dispute resolution under the procedures and subject to the other requirements set forth in paragraph (b)(6) of this section.

(3)(i) The results of studies and information-gathering referenced in paragraphs (c)(1)(ii) and (c)(2) of this section will be treated as additional information; and

(ii) Filing and acceptance of an application will not be delayed and an application will not be considered deficient or patently deficient pursuant to § 4.32(e)(1) or (e)(2) merely because the study or information gathering is not complete before the application is filed.