7 ESSENTIAL FISH HABITAT EVALUATION

The entire San Francisco Bay has been designated by NOAA Fisheries as an EFH for coastal pelagics, Pacific groundfish, and Pacific coast salmon. Within the Project Site soft bottom benthos and the water column comprise the aquatic habitat potentially affected. Coastal pelagic fish species may use the water column in the vicinity of Project activities, as may Pacific coast salmon (albeit briefly, during migration through the Bay). Pacific groundfish may use the benthic habitat in the Project vicinity. The Project Site is not a unique area for supporting preferential habitat and after the pipeline is removed benthic assemblages will quickly re-establish and cycle normally.

7.1 Analysis of Effects on EFH

The specific elements of the pipeline removal Project that could impact groundfish, pelagic, and salmonid species EFH, and the impact mechanisms that avoid and minimize impacts are identified below.

Potential effects to EFH from removing the pipeline and removing and replacing shoreline rip rap include temporary displacement of benthic and intertidal habitat, which could potentially affect foraging and prey availability. During removal activities, some sediment will become suspended plumes and dissipate rapidly. These plumes could limit the vision of pelagic fish.

Although some EFH is likely to be disturbed during removal activities, these activities will be of short duration, and temporary in nature. The time duration for removal of the pipeline is three weeks. Benthic species (fish prey) maybe disturbed during these activities, possibly causing fish to temporarily move from the area. As stated previously this would be for a short duration and temporary in nature. Benthic successional stages follow predictable sequences after any major seafloor perturbation and re-colonize rapidly. The Project site represents approximately 0.93 acres which represents a negligible percentage within San Pablo Bay. Therefore, removal activities are not likely to have a significant adverse effect on benthic species.

As stated previously, the temporary effects from suspended sediments due to removing the pipeline are not likely to adversely affect EFH species within the area. Also as discussed above, sediments were characterized and results support that sediment is not likely to cause environmental impacts.

7.2 EFH Assessment

Pursuant to the MSFCMA and the SFA, an EFH evaluation has been completed and concludes that the proposed action will not adversely affect EFH. Potential impacts from the proposed Project on groundfish habitat, coastal pelagic habitat, and salmonid habitat would be from resuspension of

sediment and disturbance of benthic habitat, which will be temporary and localized and is not expected to impact primary productivity and food resources for groundfish. Therefore, it is concluded that the proposed Project will not adversely affect EFH.

7.3 Conclusions and Determinations of Effect

Due to the temporary nature of the Project and the implementation of conservation measures (Section 2) to reduce impacts to marine resources; it is concluded that the Project will not adversely affect EFH for groundfish, coastal pelagic, and salmonid species.