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Regulators asked to reconsider Oakley power plant

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OAKLEY -- The fate of a recently approved power plant here may be up in the air again.

California's ratepayer advocate asked state regulators this week to reconsider their approval of PG&E's proposed 586-megawatt power plant, arguing that they had not given the public sufficient opportunity for input.

The Division of Ratepayer Advocates is asking the California Public Utilities Commission, which approved the Oakley plant in December, to make PG&E resubmit its proposal and go through the entire approval process again to provide the public due process.

The utilities commission initially rejected PG&E's proposal in July on grounds that the Oakley project was not necessary to meet the region's energy needs. The commission left the door open for PG&E to resubmit its proposal should circumstances change, but the utility requested an immediate rehearing after pushing its proposed date to bring the plant online from 2014 to 2016.

Despite lobbying by ratepayer and environmental groups, the commission approved the modified project by a 4-1 vote last month without making

PG&E begin the application process anew.

The commission said the new plant, which would cost ratepayers \$1.5 billion, would help lessen the risk of a shortfall in energy capacity in 2016. Oakley leaders and employers have endorsed the proposed plant, saying it will bring jobs and other economic benefits to the area.

The Oakley project may also

face a challenge from a group of environmentalists concerned about potential harm to an endangered butterfly species that lives in a 55-acre Antioch wildlife refuge.

The Wild Equity Institute this month sued in U.S. District Court to stop the Marsh Landing power plant under construction near Antioch on the grounds that pollution from the plant may harm the endangered Lange's Metalmark butterfly, violating the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

The group may use the same argument to oppose construction of the nearby Oakley plant, director Brent Plater said.

The proposed natural gas-fired Oakley plant would occupy 22 acres on Bridgehead Road near the Oakley-Antioch border, and has been contracted by PG&E to Danville-based Radback Energy.

The California Energy Commission will hold a meeting in Sacramento on Feb. 2 to discuss its preliminary staff assessment of the project.

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