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CALIFORNIA STATE LANDS COMMISSION
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Established in 1938

October 13, 2020

NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

File Ref: SCH No. 2020100234
CSLC EIR No. 763; W30213; W26868

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the California State Lands Commission (CSLC), as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), and that CSLC staff will hold two sessions of a virtual public scoping meeting pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for the project listed below.[1]

Project Title: Stagecoach Solar Project

Applicant: Aurora Solar, LLC, subsidiary of Avangrid Renewables

Project Location: The Stagecoach Solar Project area encompasses approximately 3,000 acres of State-owned land in the central portion of San Bernardino County, about 12 miles northwest of the unincorporated community of Lucerne Valley and 15 miles south of the City of Barstow. The Project area is located east of Interstate 15, south of Interstate 40, and about 3 miles west of State Route 247 (see Figure 1 in the Attachment).

Meeting Information: **Wednesday, October 28, 2020**
Sessions begin at **2 PM** and **6 PM**

2:00 PM - 3:30 PM	**6:00 PM - 7:30 PM**
Via Zoom at: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81326903472 or by Phone: **(669) 900-6833** then enter Webinar ID: **813 2690 3472**	Via Zoom at: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84455027065 or by Phone: **(669) 900-6833** then enter Webinar ID: **844 5502 7065**

[1] CEQA is in Public Resources Code section 21000 et seq.; the State CEQA Guidelines are in California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15000 et seq. The public scoping meeting will be held pursuant to CEQA (§ 21083.9, subd. (a)(2)) and the State CEQA Guidelines (§§ 15082, subd. (c), and 15083).

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The CSLC staff has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to solicit public and agency comments, in writing or at the public meeting, as to the scope and content of the environmental analysis, including the significant environmental issues, reasonable range of alternatives, and mitigation measures to include in the EIR. Applicable agencies will need to use the EIR when considering related permits or other Project approvals. This NOP, along with additional background information and the Project Description included in the Attachment, is also available online at www.slc.ca.gov (under the "Information" tab and "CEQA" link).

Written comments must be received or postmarked by November 13, 2020.[2] Please send your comments at the earliest possible date to:

Sarah Mongano Senior Environmental Scientist California State Lands Commission 100 Howe Avenue, Suite 100-South Sacramento, CA 95825	**E-mail:** CEQA.comments@slc.ca.gov (Subject Line: Stagecoach Solar Project NOP Comments) **Phone:** (916) 574-1889

PROJECT SUMMARY

Aurora Solar LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Avangrid Renewables, has applied to the CSLC for lease of lands owned by the CSLC on which to construct and operate a solar generation project, called the Stagecoach Solar Project (Project). The proposed Project would produce up to 200 megawatts (MW) of solar energy using photovoltaic (PV) technology. The proposed Project area encompasses approximately 3,000 acres, with PV modules and the following associated infrastructure to be constructed on approximately 1,950 acres:

- 5-acre 34.5/220 kilovolt (kV) onsite electric substation and a 5,000-square-foot operations and maintenance (O&M) building.
- Direct current (DC) underground electricity collection system and a 34.5 kV collection system linking the PV modules to the onsite substation.
- Battery storage facility up to 200 MW and 100 acres in size.
- Solar resource and meteorological measurement stations.
- Newly constructed access roads throughout the interior of the proposed Project limits.
- Perimeter fencing and site security systems.
- Septic tank system and leach field serving the O&M building.
- Permanent groundwater wells, or an onsite water tank using water transported from offsite, providing water for the O&M building and to wash the PV panels.

[2] Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines section 15103, Responsible and Trustee Agencies shall provide a response to a NOP within 30 days after receipt of the notice.

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The proposed Project also includes construction of a 9.1-mile-long 220 kV generation intertie (gen-tie) transmission line to carry the electricity generated by the solar facility to the regional transmission system interconnecting at a proposed 7-acre Southern California Edison Calcite Substation. More details of the background and Project Description are provided in the Attachment to this NOP.

VIRTUAL PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

Each session of the virtual public scoping meeting will be conducted using the online meeting platform Zoom. You may join by entering the web link listed above for the session you would like to join, or by dialing in by telephone at the number listed above. The Zoom meeting links will also be available on the CSLC's website at www.slc.ca.gov (under the "Information" tab and "CEQA" link). You may join from a desktop computer, laptop, mobile device, or telephone. Staff recommends that you test out your device, internet connection, and Zoom app compatibility well before attempting to join the meeting.

The CSLC staff will begin each session of the scoping meeting noticed above with a brief presentation on the proposed Project. The material presented at both sessions will be the same, two sessions are scheduled for the convenience of the attendees. After each presentation, staff will receive comments on the potential significant environmental issues, Project alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be included in the EIR, until all persons present who wish to provide oral comments have done so, at which time staff will close the session. Each session will be recorded and all oral comments will be summarized in a scoping memo. A 3-minute time limit on oral comments may be imposed. No Commission action on the EIR or Project will occur at this time; any such action will occur at a separate noticed public meeting after the EIR is finalized.

IMPORTANT NOTES TO COMMENTERS

1. If you submit written comments, you are encouraged to submit electronic copies by email to CEQA.comments@slc.ca.gov and write "**Stagecoach Solar Project NOP Comments"** in the subject line of your email.

2. Before including your mailing or email address, telephone number, or other personal identifying information in your comment, please be aware that the entire comment—including personal identifying information—may become publicly available, including in the EIR and posted on the Internet. The CSLC will make available for inspection, in their entirety, all comments submitted by organizations, businesses, or individuals identifying themselves as representatives of organizations or businesses.

3. If you represent a public agency, please provide the name, email address, and telephone number for the contact person in your agency for this EIR.

4. If you require a sign language interpreter, or other reasonable accommodation for a disability, as defined by the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act and California Fair Employment and Housing Act, in order to participate in the scoping meeting, please contact the CSLC staff person listed in this NOP at Sarah.Mongano@slc.ca.gov or

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by phone at (916) 574-1889, at least 5 days in advance of the meeting to arrange for such accommodation.

5. Please contact the staff person listed in this NOP by email at Sarah.Mongano@slc.ca.gov or by phone at (916) 574-1889 if you have any questions.

Signature: DocuSigned by: Sarah R Mongano 81AB38B9D9EC433... Date: 10/13/2020

Sarah Mongano
Senior Environmental Scientist

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ATTACHMENT
PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Stagecoach Solar Project

1.0 PROJECT BACKGROUND AND LOCATION

Aurora Solar LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Avangrid Renewables (Applicant), has applied to the California State Land Commission (CSLC) for lease of lands owned by the State on which to construct and operate a solar generation project, called the Stagecoach Solar Project (Project). The proposed Project would produce up to 200 megawatts (MW) of solar energy using photovoltaic (PV) technology.

The proposed Project would be constructed on approximately 1,950 acres within a nearly 3,000-acre Project area in the central portion of San Bernardino County, about 15 miles south of the City of Barstow and 12 miles northwest of the unincorporated community of Lucerne Valley. The Project area boundary encompasses five sections of undeveloped State land under the jurisdiction of the CSLC, as well as 640 adjacent acres of private land owned by Aurora Solar, LLC. Private lands and federal lands managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management are adjacent to the Project area. Figure 1 provides a map of the Project location and Project components.

2.0 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

2.1 Project Objectives

The Applicant's objectives for the Stagecoach Solar Project are to:

- Establish reliable solar PV power-generating facilities in an economically feasible and commercially financeable manner that can be marketed to potential power purchasers.
- Develop land managed by the Commission with renewable energy facility leases to generate revenue applied to the State.
- Assist California utilities in meeting their obligations under California's Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS). In September 2018, Governor Brown signed Senate Bill 100, which requires California electric utilities to generate at least 60% of their power from renewable resources and to mandate that the state obtain all of its electricity from carbon-free sources by 2045.
- Assist California in meeting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction goal as required by the California Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), as amended by SB 32 in 2016, which establishes a target of GHG emissions reductions in the State to be 40% of 1990 levels by 2030.
- Assist California in transitioning the transportation sector to zero-emission vehicles by 2035 under Executive Order N-79-20, signed by Governor Newsom on September 23, 2020.

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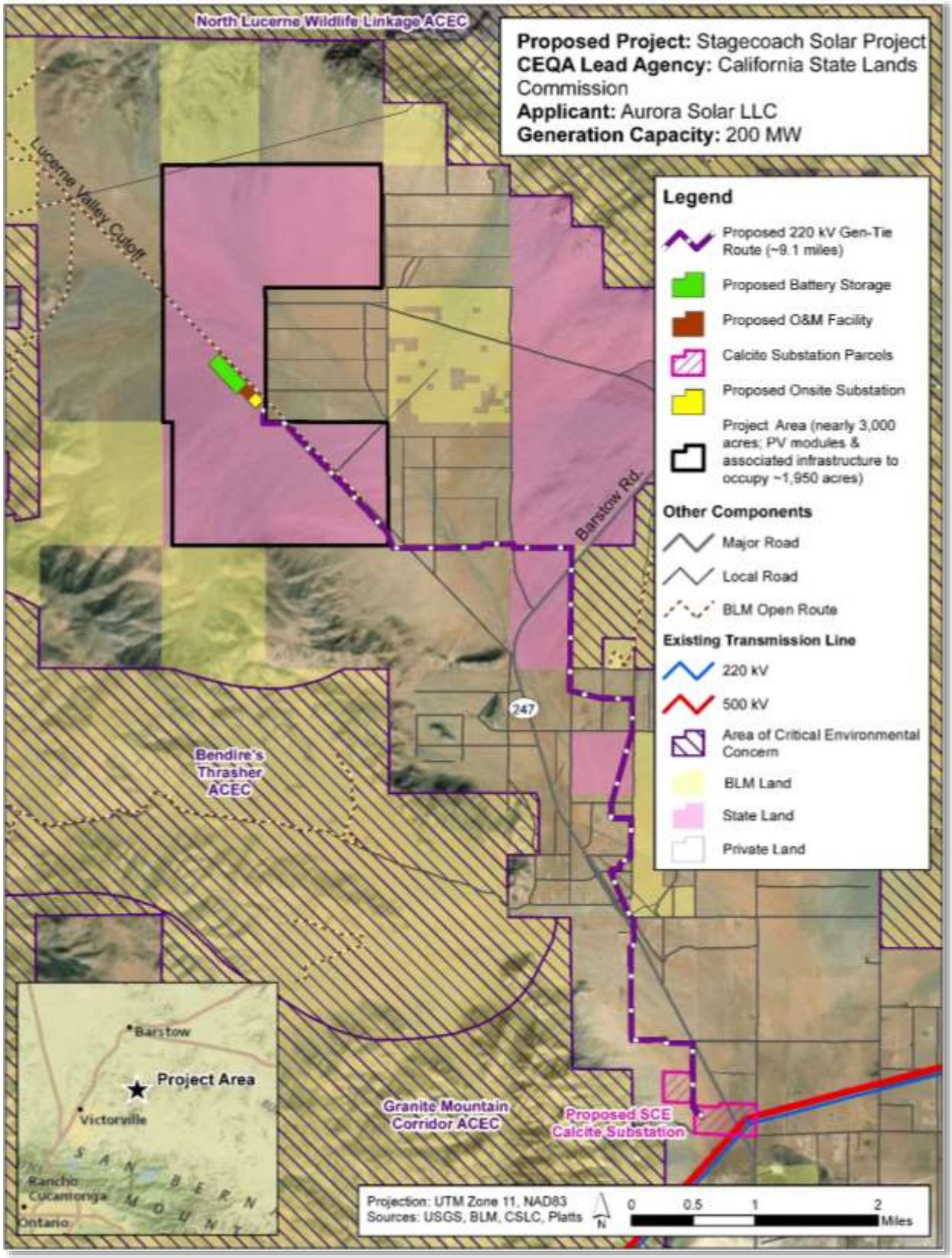
Figure 1. Project Location



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- Co-locate energy storage facilities of sufficient size and configuration to reliably store electricity in an economically feasible and commercially financeable manner to facilitate the integration of solar energy into the CAISO transmission grid.
- Locate solar power plant and associated energy storage facilities as close as possible to electrical transmission facilities with anticipated capacity and available interconnection to the CAISO transmission grid.
- Site the Project in an area with high solar insolation[3] in order to maximize productivity from the PV technology.
- Use proven and available solar PV and energy storage technologies.
- Create local short- and long-term employment and business opportunities in the region.

2.2 Project Facilities

The proposed Project includes PV modules and the following associated infrastructure to be constructed on approximately 1,950 acres within an approximately 3,000-acre Project area:

- A 5-acre 34.5/220 kilovolt (kV) onsite electric substation and a 5,000-square-foot operations and maintenance (O&M) building.
- A direct current (DC) underground electricity collection system and a 34.5 kV collection system linking the PV modules to the onsite substation.
- A battery storage facility up to 200 MW and 100 acres in size.
- Solar resource and meteorological measurement stations.
- Newly constructed access roads throughout the interior of the Project limits.
- Perimeter fencing and site security systems.
- A septic tank system and leach field serving the O&M building.
- Permanent groundwater wells, or an onsite water tank using water transported from offsite, providing water for the O&M building and to wash the PV panels.

A 9.1-mile-long 220 kV generation intertie (gen-tie) transmission line would carry the electricity generated by the Stagecoach Project to the regional transmission system interconnecting at the proposed 7-acre Southern California Edison Calcite Substation.

[3] Insolation is a measure of solar radiation energy received on a given surface in a given time. It is commonly expressed as an average irradiance in watts per square meter (W/m^2) or kilowatt-hours per square meter per day ($kWh/m^2/day$). The region in which the Project is located receives greater than 5.75 $kWh/m^2/day$ of solar radiation energy, giving it a higher degree of solar radiation than most areas within the United States.

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2.3 Project Construction

Construction of the proposed Project is anticipated to require approximately 18 months to complete and would require an average daily workforce of up to 175 workers with up to 400 workers per day onsite during the peak construction period (approximately 12 months). During the peak of construction, a typical day at the site would include the transportation and installation of trackers, movement of heavy equipment, and transportation and installation of modules and other materials.

Construction of the PV systems would involve clearing and grubbing of existing vegetation, installing support racks, placing of modules and inverter units, trenching and installation of the underground collection system, and construction of internal service roads.

Construction activities for the associated Project facilities would include: clearing and grading; construction of drainage components; foundation construction; development of staging areas and site access roads; and construction of the electrical substation, energy storage facility, O&M building, and transmission facilities. Security fencing would be installed around the perimeter of the Project infrastructure.

2.4 Operations and Maintenance

Following the construction phase, the O&M building would serve as the Project's office facilities for up to 10 permanent full-time employees. The Project facilities would be monitored during operating (daylight) hours, even though the Project would be capable of automatic start up, shutdown, self-diagnosis, and fault detection. Appropriate levels of security lighting would be installed, and the site would be secured 24 hours per day by onsite private security personnel or remote security services with motion-detection cameras.

Maintenance activities for PV modules would include on-site repairs as required. Panel washing may be conducted as necessary based on site conditions.

On a regular basis personnel would visit the substation to perform routine maintenance including (but not limited to) equipment testing, monitoring, and repair, routine procedures to ensure service continuity, and standard preventative maintenance. The underground cable system and battery storage facility would be inspected, maintained, and repaired as necessary, following construction.

2.5 Closure and Decommissioning

If, at the end of the CSLC lease and/or contract term to sell energy to the utility buyer, no contract extension is available or no other buyer of the energy emerges, the solar plant would be decommissioned and dismantled. After removal of all construction related on-site improvements, remediation and restoration of the area would be performed on the site to its pre-construction condition.

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3.0 PERMITS AND AGENCY COORDINATION

In addition to action by the CSLC, the Project may require permits and approvals from other reviewing authorities and regulatory agencies that may have oversight over aspects of the proposed Project activities, including, but not limited to, those listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Potential Responsible, Coordinating, and Consultation Agencies/Entities

State	California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
	California Department of Transportation, District 8
	Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) (Region 7, Colorado River)
	California Public Utilities Commission
	State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO)
Local	Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD)
	San Bernardino County
Tribal	Project activities will be coordinated with local tribes consistent with the CSLC's Tribal Consultation Policy adopted in August 2016 (see www.slc.ca.gov).

4.0 SCOPE OF THE EIR

Pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines section 15060, the CSLC staff conducted a preliminary review of the proposed Project and determined that an EIR was necessary based on the potential for significant impacts resulting from the proposed Project. A preliminary list of environmental issues and alternatives to be discussed in the EIR is provided below. Additional issues and alternatives may be identified at the public scoping meeting and in written comments as part of the EIR process. The CSLC invites comments and suggestions on the scope and content of the environmental analysis, including the significant environmental issues, reasonable range of alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be included in the EIR.

The CSLC uses the following designations when examining the potential for impacts.

Potentially Significant Impact	Any impact that could be significant, and for which feasible mitigation must be identified and implemented. If any potentially significant impacts are identified but cannot be mitigated to a less than significant level, the impact would be *significant and unavoidable*; if any potentially significant impacts are identified for which feasible, enforceable mitigation measures are developed and imposed to reduce said impacts to below applicable significance thresholds, the impact would be *less than significant with mitigation*.
Less Than Significant Impact	Any impact that would not be considered significant under CEQA relative to the applicable significance threshold, and therefore would not require mitigation.

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No Impact	The Project would not result in any impact to the resource area considered.
Beneficial Impact	The Project would provide an improvement to the associated environment in comparison to the baseline information.

The estimations of impact levels used for this NOP are based solely on preliminary documents. Impact levels may change and additional impacts may be identified during preparation of the EIR as more information is obtained.

4.1 EIR Alternatives Analysis

In addition to analyzing the potential impacts associated with the proposed Project, in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must:

> *…describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project, or to the location of the project, which would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the project, and evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives* (§ 15126.6).

The State CEQA Guidelines also require that the EIR evaluate a "no project" alternative and, under specific circumstances, designate an environmentally superior alternative from among the remaining alternatives. The EIR will:

- Identify alternatives based on the environmental analysis and information received during scoping
- provide the basis for selecting alternatives that are feasible and that would reduce significant impacts associated with the proposed Project
- provide a detailed explanation of why any alternatives were rejected from further analysis
- evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives including the "no project" alternative.

Examples of possible alternatives, or combinations of alternatives, to be evaluated in the EIR or discussed and eliminated from further consideration based on criteria set forth in the State CEQA Guidelines (e.g., infeasibility), include the following:

- Reduced Footprint Alternative
- Generation-Tie Line Route Alternatives

4.2 Currently Identified Potential Environmental Impacts

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15060, CSLC staff conducted a preliminary review of the proposed Project and determined that an EIR was necessary based on the potential for significant direct, indirect and/or cumulative impacts resulting from the Project. A preliminary list of environmental issues to be discussed in the EIR is provided below.

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Based on initial internal scoping, the Project is not anticipated to affect the following environmental factors identified in State CEQA Guidelines Appendix G (Environmental Checklist Form), which could therefore be eliminated from consideration in the EIR.

- Agricultural and Forestry Resources
- Mineral Resources

Additional issues and/or alternatives may be identified at the public scoping meeting, and in written comments, as part of the EIR process. The CSLC invites comments and suggestions on the scope and content of the environmental analysis, including the significant environmental issues, reasonable range of alternatives, and mitigation measures that should be included in the EIR.

Environmental Topic	**Anticipated Project Impacts**
Aesthetics	The EIR will examine Project impacts resulting from substantial visual contrast (including nighttime lighting and daytime glare) from several representative viewpoints.
Agricultural and Forestry Resources	There are no agricultural or forestry resources within or near the Project area.
Air Quality	The EIR will examine emissions of criteria air pollutants and dust generated from construction and operation activities.
Biological Resources	The EIR will examine potential construction impacts (e.g., permanent loss or temporary disturbance to vegetation and wildlife habitat) as well as operational impacts (e.g., wildlife mortality from vehicle operation within the solar field). The EIR will also examine proposed Project activities on federally or State-listed species or species proposed for listing; conflicts with any local policies on biological resources; and any conflicts with local, regional, or State habitat conservation plans.
Cultural Resources	The EIR will examine Project impacts to historic and architectural resources due to ground disturbance during construction or visual changes to cultural landscapes.
Cultural Resources – Tribal	In accordance with Assembly Bill 52 and CEQA requirements, the EIR will address the presence of and impacts to tribal cultural resources in consultation with Native American Tribes.
Energy	The EIR will examine the potential for wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources during Project construction or operation and the Project's consistency with state or local plans for renewable energy.
Geology and Soils	The EIR will examine potential construction and operation impacts primarily associated with the potential for soil erosion.
Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change	The EIR will examine Project emissions of greenhouse gases and the consistency of the proposed Project with applicable plans and programs adopted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
Growth Inducement	The EIR will examine whether the Project would foster economic or population growth in the Project's vicinity.

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Environmental Topic	Anticipated Project Impacts
Hazards and Hazardous Materials	The EIR will examine Project hazards and hazardous materials resulting from construction and operation activities (e.g., waste management, potential for accidental release of a hazardous material, transmission line safety and nuisance, and fire hazards).
Hydrology and Water Quality	The EIR will examine potential construction and operational-related impacts to groundwater supplies, drainage and flooding conditions, erosion and sedimentation inducement, and water quality.
Land Use and Planning	The EIR will examine the status of the County's General Plan as it relates to the renewable energy, transmission line right-of-way, State land rights, and proximity of federal lands to the Project.
Mineral Resources	There are no known mineral resources on the site, and it is anticipated the Project would not affect access to nearby resources.
Noise	The EIR will examine Project impacts to ambient noise and vibration levels resulting from construction and operation.
Population and Housing	The EIR will examine Project impacts to the economic and population growth of the surrounding area.
Public Services	The EIR will examine Project impacts on law enforcement, fire protection, schools, and other public services.
Recreation	The EIR will examine Project impacts to recreational opportunities in established federal, State, or local recreation areas.
Transportation and Traffic	The EIR will examine Project construction and operation impacts to transportation and public access to roads and highways and BLM-designated open routes.
Utilities and Service Systems	The EIR will examine Project impacts to the existing capacity and future implementation of water supply, wastewater, solid waste, and energy utility and service systems.
Wildfire	The EIR will examine Project impacts to emergency response and wildfire-related risks.

4.3 Special Impact Areas

4.3.1 Cumulative Impacts

The State CEQA Guidelines require an EIR to discuss the cumulative impacts of a project when the project's incremental effect is "cumulatively considerable" (§ 15130). A cumulative impact is created through a combination of the project being analyzed in an EIR and other projects in the area causing related impacts. The EIR will:

- define the geographic scope of the area affected by cumulative effects ("Cumulative Projects Study Area"), which varies for each resource issue area
- discuss the cumulative impacts of the proposed Project, in conjunction with other approved and reasonably foreseeable projects in the study area
- identify, if appropriate, feasible measures to mitigate or avoid the Project's contribution to cumulative effects.

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4.3.2 Growth-Inducing Impacts

CEQA requires a discussion of the ways in which a proposed project could foster economic or population growth, including the construction of additional housing, in the project's vicinity. Under State CEQA Guidelines section 15126.2, subdivision (e), a project is growth-inducing if it fosters or removes obstacles to economic or population growth, provides new employment, extends access or services, taxes existing services, or causes development elsewhere. The EIR will contain a discussion of the potential growth-inducing impacts of the proposed Project.

4.3.3 Environmental Justice

Though not required by CEQA, the EIR will examine whether the Project would have the potential to disproportionately affect area(s) of high minority population(s) and low-income communities, as well as the Project's consistency with the CSLC environmental justice policy.