

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND
PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING FOR THE
Cornucopia Solar Project**

TO: Responsible and Trustee Agencies, other interested agencies, and members of the public

FROM: County of Fresno, Department of Public Works and Planning
Development Services and Capital Projects Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, CA 93721

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report for the Cornucopia Hybrid Solar Project

Date: May 3, 2024

Action: The County of Fresno (County) will be the Lead Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and will be responsible for preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines for the Cornucopia Hybrid Solar Project.

Project Title: Cornucopia Hybrid Solar Project, Unclassified Conditional Use Permit Application No. 3777 & EIR No. 8511

Project Applicant: BayWa r.e. Solar Projects LLC

Project Location and Summary:

The applicant proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a new solar energy generation facility capable of generating approximately 300 MW of energy and an approximately 300 MW of alternating current (MWac) battery storage system and associated infrastructure and buildings (Project). The proposed Project would be located on approximately 2,446 acres of private land within portions of Assessor Parcel Numbers 090-030-06S, 090-030-04S, 090-030-02S, 090-030-03, 090-040-01, 085-110-23S, 085-110-12, and 085-110-13S in western Fresno County. The site is located approximately 11 miles southeast of the City of Coalinga in Fresno County, 2.75 miles northwest of the City of Avenal in Kings County, and 4 miles west of Interstate 5 (I-5). The disadvantaged unincorporated community of Lost Hills is contiguous to the southeast portion of the project of the site off SR 33. The Project site is intersected north to south by State Route (SR) 33 (South Lost Hills Road) and east to west by Sutter Avenue. The Project site is located within Township 21 South, Range 16 East, Sections 34, 35, and 36; Township 22 South, Range 16 East, Sections 1, 2; and Range 17 East, Section 6 of the Avenal, California United States Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute Topographical Quadrangle Map.

The solar energy generation facility would consist of photovoltaic (PV) solar modules, a substation and switching station, an energy storage system, and two prefabricated structures to be used for maintenance and operation services and for control services. The PV solar modules would be arranged into arrays supported by racking systems and units that track the sun. The modules would be connected to power inverters to convert the sunlight energy into usable alternating current power. The energy would then be transferred from the inverters to a Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) switching station, to ultimately transfer the power to the local electrical grid. The substation and the PG&E switching station would be located within the southeast corner of the Project boundaries. The substation would include an electrical control building and would tie into the

PG&E switching station via a new transmission line. The energy storage system would consist of a battery storage system comprising of lithium-ion, flow, or sodium sulfur batteries and would be able to store approximately 300 MWac of electricity. The energy storage system would be located adjacent to the substation, with a footprint of approximately 12 acres in size. The Project site is located on parcels subject to Williamson Act agricultural preserve contracts. The applicant proposes to retain agricultural preserve status by providing sheep grazing lands within and surrounding the proposed solar PV panels and equipment.

A project description, maps, and figures are available for review at the following locations:

- Fresno County Public Works and Planning Department, 2220 Tulare Street, Suite A Street Level, Fresno, CA 93721
- Fresno County website: <https://www.fresnocountyca.gov/eir8511>

Written Comments:

This Notice of Preparation (NOP) solicits comments from Responsible and Trustee Agencies and other public agencies so that Project-related concerns relevant to each agency’s statutory responsibilities can be addressed in the EIR. This NOP also solicits input from other interested parties, including Tribes and members of the public. The County requests that any potential Responsible or Trustee Agencies responding to this NOP reply in a manner consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b), which allows for submittal of any comments in response to this notice no later than 30 days after receipt of the NOP. Comments in response to this NOP will be accepted through June 3, 2024.

Please send written scoping input to:

Attn: Jeremy Shaw
Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning
Development Services and Capital Projects Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, CA 93721
Phone: (559) 600-4207 Fax: (559) 600-4200
Email: jshaw@FresnoCountyCA.gov

Please reference EIR 8511, Cornucopia Hybrid Solar Project. Include your name, address, and phone number and/or email address so that we may contact you for clarification, if necessary.

Public Scoping Meeting:

CEQA encourages public input throughout the planning process. Consistent with CEQA and CEQA Guidelines Section 15083, oral and written comments may be presented at a scoping meeting where the County will solicit input on the scope and content of the EIR, including environmental impacts of concern and mitigation measures or alternatives that should be considered. The scoping meeting will be held online for 30 minutes or until all who wish to speak have had an opportunity to do so. Scoping meeting details are as follows:

Date: Tuesday, May 14, 2024
Time: 3:30 p.m.
If joining from a computer: <https://bit.ly/CornucopiaScopingMtg>
Webinar ID: 881 1371 1821
If joining by phone: (888) 788-0099

Physical Setting:

The Project site consists of agricultural and vacant, undeveloped land. The surrounding land is predominantly agricultural land and large areas of vacant, undeveloped land to the north and south; the Lost Hills residential community and vacant land to the east; and vacant, undeveloped land to the west. Sutter Avenue bisects the site from north to south and SR-33 crosses through the site from the northwest to the southeast. Utility poles and power lines are located around the perimeter of the site. Multiple structures exist adjacent to the Project boundary in the Lost Hills community, with the closest residence located approximately 200 linear feet from the nearest proposed PV panel. All eight parcels associated with the Project site within Williamson Act agricultural preserve contracts. Three existing wells are located within the leased areas of the site.

Approximately 2,075 acres of the site is located within a Federal Emergency Management Agency Flood Zone and another approximately 309 acres of the site is designated as Special Flood Hazard Area. Approximately 10.4 acres of riverine features exist within the site. Within 10 miles of the site, 34 special-status plant species and 32 special-status wildlife species exist.

Land Use Designation:

The project site is designated for Agriculture in the County General Plan and all eight parcels within the site are zoned Exclusive Agricultural (AE). The site includes parcels zoned AE-20 and AE-40 (Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size and 40-acre minimum parcel size, respectively) pursuant to the County's Zoning Map. The AE zone is intended to be an exclusive district for agriculture and for those uses which are necessary and an integral part of an agricultural operation.

According to Fresno County Zoning Ordinance, Chapter 842.5, *Conditional Use Permits*, the proposed solar energy generation facility falls under Section 842.5.020, Item B.14, which permits the following uses with an Unclassified Conditional Use Permit (CUP): power production and generation facilities, including utility-scale PV facilities subject to the County's adopted Solar Facility Guidelines.

Alternatives to be Analyzed in the EIR:

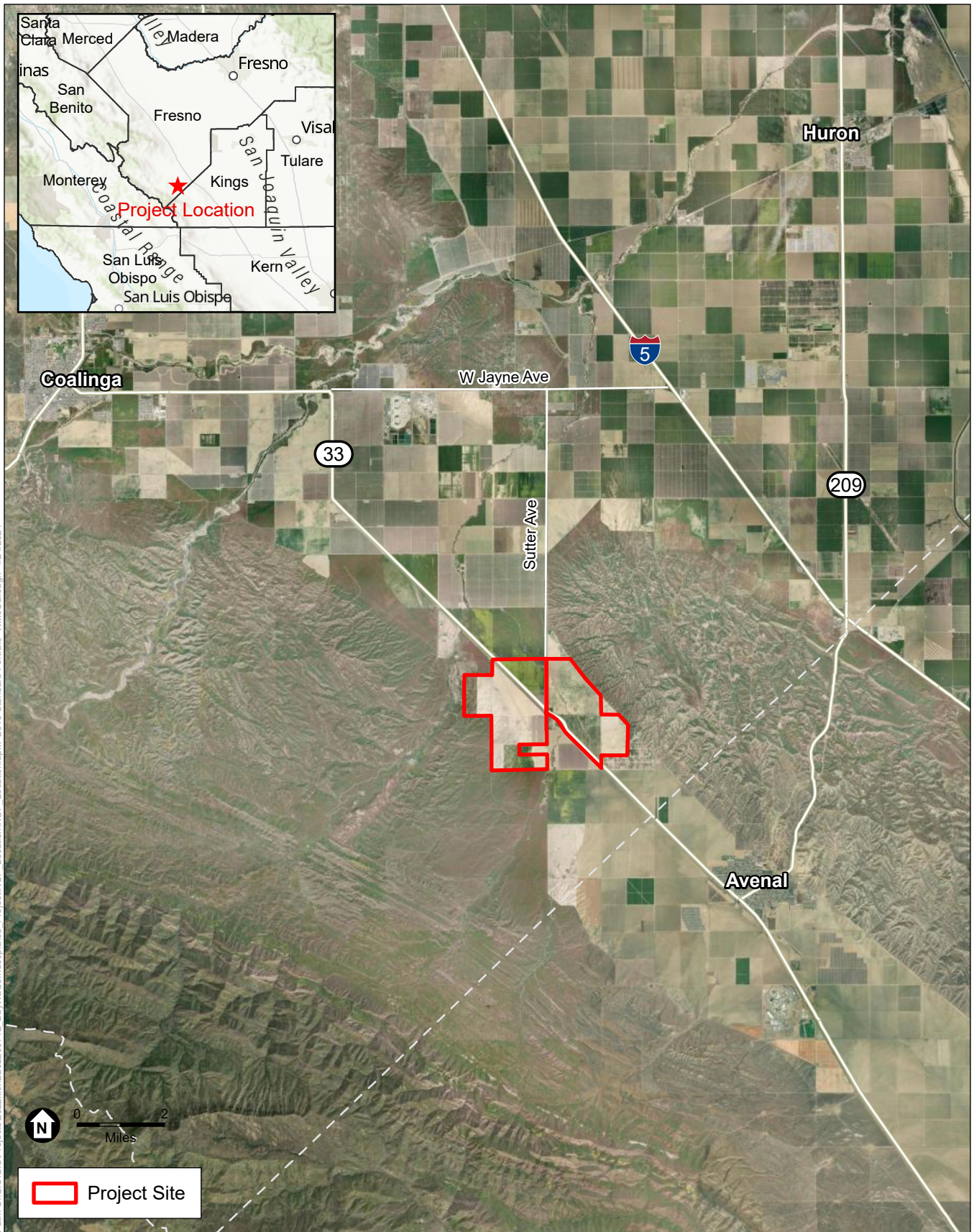
In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the Draft EIR will assess a range of alternatives to the Project, including a No Project Alternative and one or more other alternatives that would attain most of the basic objectives of the Project while avoiding or reducing any of its significant environmental effects. Potential alternatives will be identified during the scoping process.

Potential Environmental Impacts:

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(d), the County has determined that this Project could result in one or more significant impacts on the physical environment, thereby necessitating the preparation of an EIR, and so has not prepared an Initial Study. The EIR will analyze the environmental issues identified in the CEQA Guidelines Appendix G Environmental Checklist (listed below) after establishing the environmental setting, or baseline, for the analysis. The EIR will identify potential significant direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Project and alternatives related to:

- Aesthetic quality and views, particularly in the vicinity of existing communities;
- Agriculture and forestry resources, including the use of property currently subject to Williamson Act contracts to an energy storage use for the duration of the permit term, some portions of the land may be considered prime farmland or farmland of statewide importance;
- Air quality and noise in the vicinity of sensitive receptors, particularly from equipment;
- The intersection of air quality, energy use, transportation, and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions;

- Biological resources, including species and habitats, based on database queries, field surveys, and agency consultations, if required;
- Cultural and tribal cultural resources that could be disturbed during construction, based on record searches, field surveys, and input that may be received from California Native American Tribes;
- Geology and soils, paleontological resources, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, and related considerations and constraints;
- The Project's relationship to land use and planning, as well as lands subject to special resources management activities, such as mineral resources and recreation;
- Population and housing, public services, and utilities and service systems;
- Wildfire, including the potential to exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose people to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire; and
- Growth inducement, particularly in relation to existing, adopted development plans for Fresno County.



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SOURCE: ESA, 2024

Cornucopia Hybrid Solar Project

Figure 1
Project Location

