

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
AND PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING FOR
THE LITTLE BEAR 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 Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, CA 93721

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Little Bear Solar Project

Date: August 31, 2017

Action: The County of Fresno (County) will be the Lead Agency pursuant to the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and will be responsible for preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines. The EIR will analyze potential impacts of the requested Conditional Use Permits for the Little Bear Solar Project (EIR #7225).

Project Title: Little Bear Solar Project

Project Applicants: Little Bear Solar 1 LLC, Little Bear Solar 3 LLC, Little Bear Solar 4 LLC, Little Bear Solar 5 LLC, and Little Bear Solar 6 LLC

Project Summary:

Little Bear Solar 1 LLC, Little Bear Solar 3 LLC, Little Bear Solar 4 LLC, Little Bear Solar 5 LLC, and Little Bear Solar 6 LLC (collectively, Applicant) have submitted to the County Conditional Use Permit (CUP) applications to construct, operate, and ultimately decommission up-to 180-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating facilities and associated infrastructure, to be known as Little Bear Solar 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6, or the Little Bear Solar Project (Project). The Project would generate and deliver solar-generated power to the California electrical grid via PG&E's Mendota Substation. The approximately 1,288-acre Project site is on Westlands Water District-owned lands in unincorporated Fresno County, immediately west of State Route 33 (SR-33), approximately 2.5 miles southwest of the City of Mendota, and 13 miles east of Interstate 5. The Project site is agricultural: the parcels currently are periodically dry-farmed, typically for grain or forage crops. A more detailed description is provided below.

The Applicant's Project Description and site plan as well as a location map, are available for review at the following locations:

- Fresno County Public Works and Planning Department, 2220 Tulare Street, Fresno, CA 93721
- Fresno County website: <http://www.co.fresno.ca.us/viewdocument.aspx?id=74176>

Written Comments:

As required by Section 15082 and CEQA Guidelines, this Notice of Preparation ("NOP") has been prepared and distributed to solicit comments from potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies and other public agencies so that Project-related concerns relevant to each agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Project can be addressed in the EIR, as well as any related issues from interested parties other than potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies, including other agencies and affected members of the public. The EIR will be the environmental document of reference for Responsible and Trustee Agencies when considering subsequent discretionary approvals.

The County requests that any potential Responsible or Trustee Agencies responding to this NOP reply in a manner consistent with Section 15082(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, 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 5 p.m., Monday, October 9, 2017. Written comments should be addressed to the person noted below.

Please send your written comments to:


Attn: Christina Monfette
Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning
Development Services Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, CA 93721
Phone: (559) 600-4245 Fax: (559) 600-4200
Email: cmonfette@co.fresno.ca.us

Please reference EIR #7225, Little Bear Solar Project. Please include your name, address, and phone number and/or email address so that we may contact you for clarification, if necessary.

Public Scoping Meeting:

The CEQA process encourages comments and questions from the public throughout the planning process. Consistent with the California Public Resources Code and Section 15083(c)(1), (2)(A) to (D) of the CEQA Guidelines, a Public Scoping Meeting will be held to solicit public and agency comments on the scope and content of the Draft EIR (DEIR). Oral and/or written comments also may be presented at the Public Scoping Meeting. The Public Scoping Meeting will be held on:

Date: Thursday, September 14, 2017
Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Place: City of Mendota City Council Chambers, 643 Quince Street, Mendota, CA 93640

Signature:  Date: 9/15/17

Project Location:

The Project site is located on Westlands Water District-owned lands in unincorporated western Fresno County, immediately west of SR-33, approximately 2.5 miles southwest of the City of Mendota, and 13 miles east of Interstate 5. The Project site would encompass five parcels bounded by West California Avenue to the north, SR-33 to the east, West Jensen Avenue to the south, and San Bernardino Avenue to the west. See Figure 1, *Little Bear Solar Project Site Location*.

Physical Setting:

The Project site encompasses five parcels owned by the Westlands Water District. The Project site consists of disturbed agricultural land that is periodically dry-farmed, typically for grain or forage crops. The site is subject to high levels of selenium and a water table that does not provide for sufficient drainage for commercially irrigated crops. Irrigation is not allowed on any of the land within the Project site. Because the Project site is cultivated without the benefit of irrigation, the productivity of the crop depends entirely on rainfall. There is an approximately 5,000 square-foot metal storage shed and approximately 2,500 square-feet of metal storage silos located the parcel located just east of South Ohio Avenue. No other structures are located on the Project site.

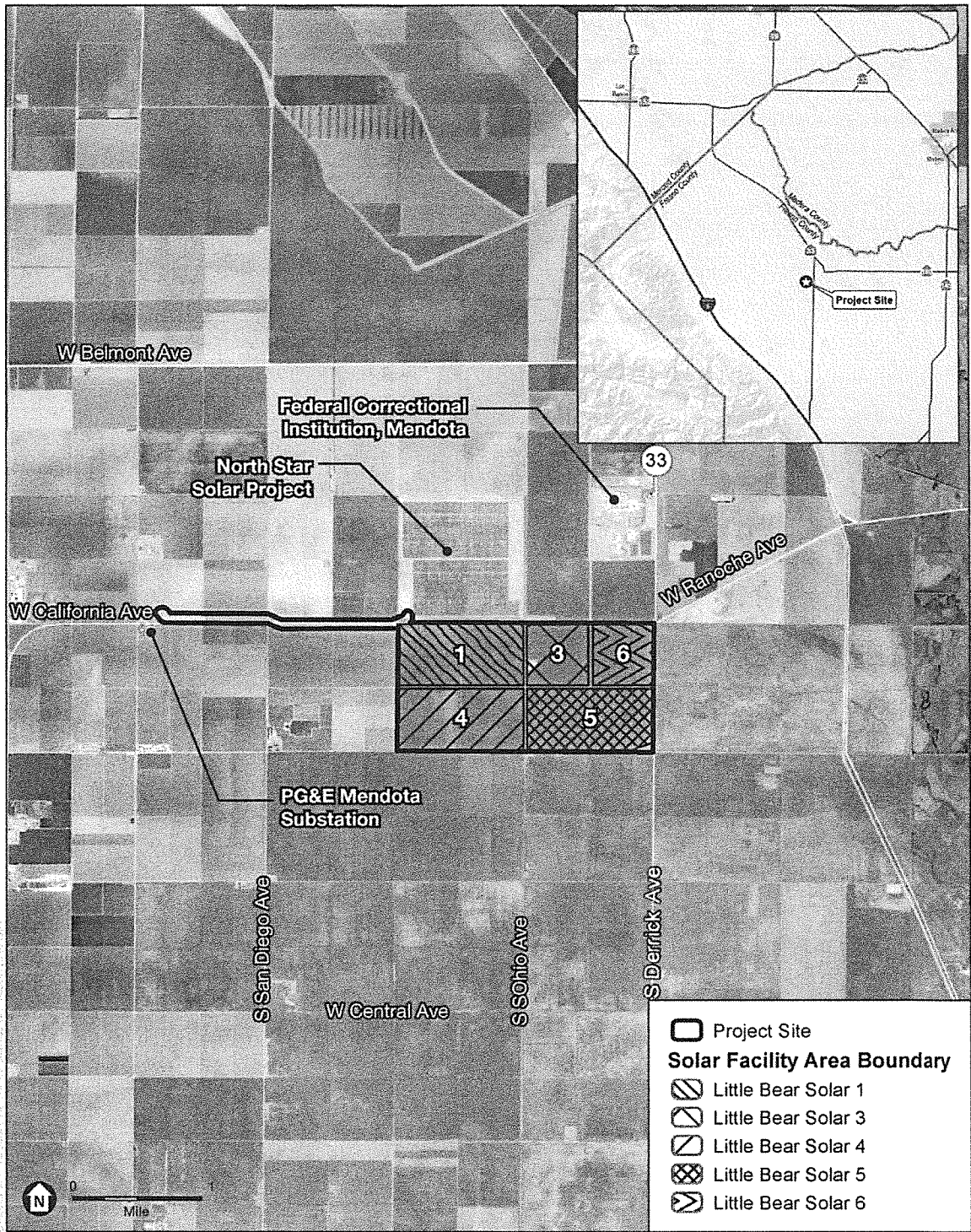
Adjacent land uses include agriculture to the east, south and west of the Little Bear site and an existing solar PV project and related powerline infrastructure (the North Star Solar Project) to the north.

Land Use Designation:

The Project site consists of disturbed agricultural land designated as Agriculture in the Fresno County General Plan, and zoned AE-20 (Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size) pursuant to the Ordinance Code of the County of Fresno, Zoning Map. The County Code (Section 816.2) permits electric transmission substations and electric distribution stations on parcels zoned Exclusive Agricultural, subject to Director Review and Approval, and does not discuss solar facilities. The designation protects the general welfare of the agricultural community from encroachments of unrelated agricultural uses that, by their nature, would be injurious to the physical and economic well-being of the agricultural district. Uses in the AE-20 zone district are limited to primarily agricultural uses and other activities compatible with agricultural uses. The Project site consists of approximately 1,288-acres of Farmland of Local Importance as designated by the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The Project site is not subject to a Williamson Act contract.

Major Components of the Project:

The Project consists of two major components: the Solar Facility and the Generation Tie-Line (gen-tie line). The Solar Facility would consist of five individual facilities with solar PV modules (or panels), support structures, electrical inverters, and intermediate voltage transformers. Each individual facility also would include a substation, inverters, and transformers. Each facility also could include an Energy Storage System (ESS) that would provide up to 500 megawatt hours of electrical storage. Other necessary infrastructure would include a permanent operation and maintenance building, water storage, meteorological data system, telecommunications infrastructure, access roads, and security fencing. The solar modules at the site would operate during daylight 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and would generate up to 180 MW of solar power. The Project would generate electricity during daylight hours when electricity demand is at its peak.



SOURCE: ESA, 2017

First Solar Little Bear

Figure 1
Little Bear Solar Project Site Location



The Project would, where possible, share the existing two-mile-long 115 kV gen-tie line and underground communication lines between the North Star Solar Project substation and PG&E's existing Mendota Substation. The installation of new gen-tie line transmission poles would be required.

Alternatives to be Analyzed in the EIR:

In accordance with Section 15126.6 of the CEQA Guidelines, the DEIR will assess a range of reasonable alternatives to the Project. The range of alternatives to be addressed will include a No Project Alternative as well as 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 coordinated consultation and scoping process.

Potential Environmental Impacts:

An Initial Study typically is prepared during the preliminary review process to determine whether a project is subject to CEQA. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(d), the lead agency can determine that an EIR will be clearly required for a project and may skip further initial review and begin work directly on the EIR. The County has determined that this Project could result in significant environmental impacts and/or have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment, thereby necessitating the preparation of an EIR, and so has not prepared an Initial Study.

The EIR will analyze energy conservation and all environmental issues identified in the CEQA Environmental Checklist Form (listed below), after having first established the environmental setting, or baseline, for the environmental analysis. The EIR will identify any 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 now in non-irrigated agricultural use to a renewable energy generation use for the duration of the permit term;
- Air Quality and noise in the vicinity of sensitive receptors, particularly during construction;
- Biological resources, including species and habitats, based on database queries, field surveys, and agency consultations, if required;
- Cultural resources and paleontological resources that could be disturbed during construction, based on record searches and field surveys;
- Energy conservation, regarding the efficient use of energy;
- Geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, and related considerations and constraints;
- Greenhouse gas emissions, including the incremental Project-specific contribution to global climate change;
- 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;
- Transportation and traffic, particularly during construction activities;
- Population and housing, public services, and utilities and service systems; and
- Growth inducement, particularly in relation to existing, adopted development plans for Fresno County.