

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT
AND PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING FOR THE HEARTLAND HYDROGEN 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 Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) No. 7564 for the Heartland Hydrogen Project

Date: October 24, 2022

Action: The County of Fresno (County) will be the Lead Agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and responsible for preparing an EIR pursuant to CEQA and the CEQA Guidelines that analyzes potential impacts of the requested Conditional Use Permits and Variance Application.

Project Title: Heartland Hydrogen Project, Unclassified Conditional Use Permit Application Nos. 3630 and 3631 and Variance Application No. 4122

Project Applicants: Plug Project Holding Co., LLC and Heartland Solar 1, LLC

Project Summary and Location

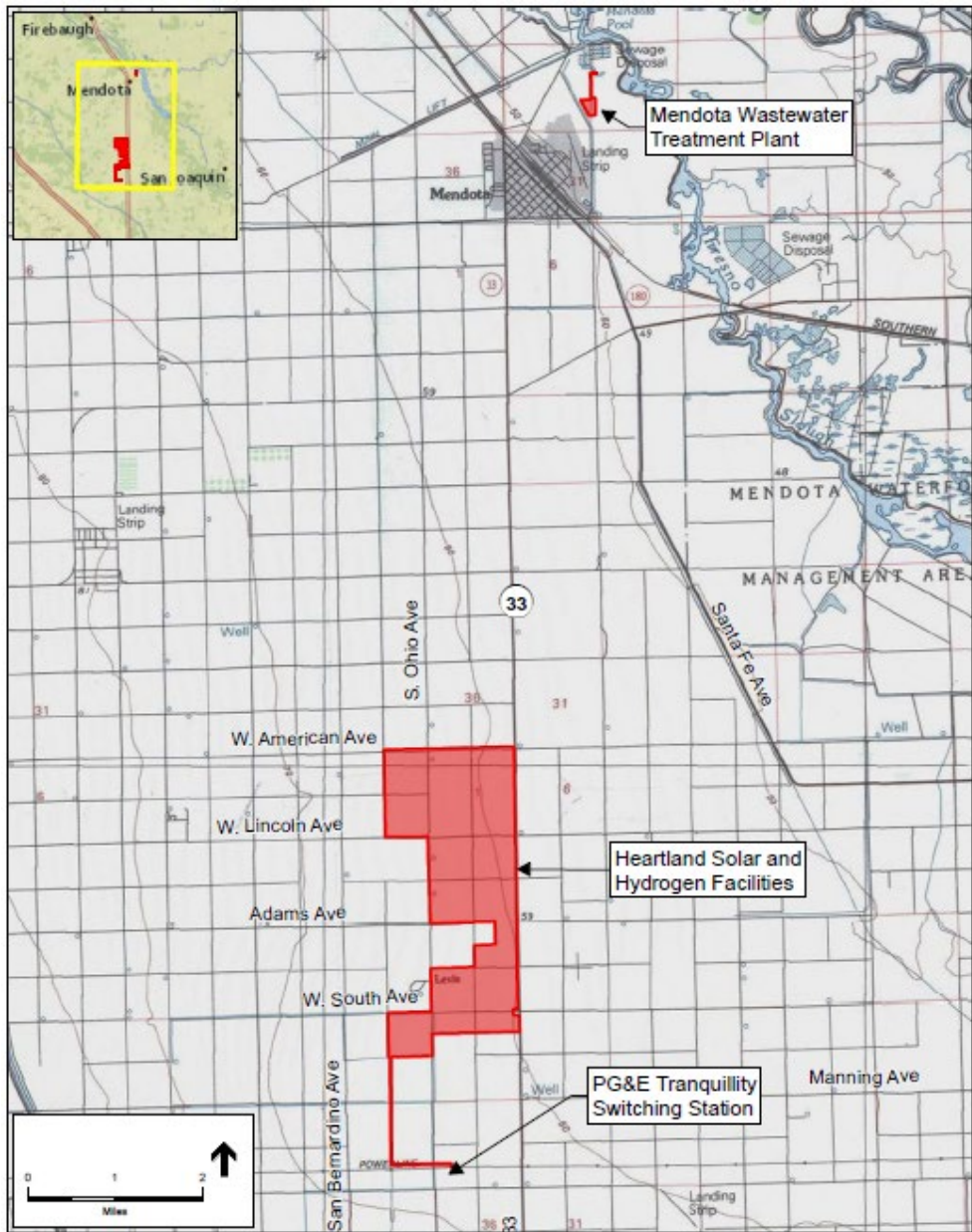
The Applicants propose to construct, operate, maintain, and eventually decommission facilities to generate hydrogen fuel from renewable sources (photovoltaic solar energy and treated wastewater) on approximately 2,371 acres in western Fresno County. The Project would rely on the proposed solar facility to convert sunlight into electricity, which would be used to power the hydrogen facility that would split the recycled water into hydrogen and oxygen (electrolysis). The hydrogen, solar, and tertiary wastewater treatment facilities together constitute the Heartland Hydrogen Project (Project). The Project also includes an approximate 1.25-mile electrical interconnection service line to the existing Tranquillity Switching Station, a second transmission line internal to the solar/hydrogen site to provide power from the solar facility to the hydrogen facility, and other associated facilities and infrastructure. The Project would be capable of producing approximately 30,000 kilograms per day of renewable or “green” hydrogen for zero-emission transportation fuel to be used by fuel-cell electric vehicles operating statewide.

Hydrogen fuel production and solar energy generation would occur on privately owned, disturbed agricultural land currently owned by the Westlands Water District; tertiary wastewater treatment would occur at a new facility to be built within the existing Mendota Wastewater Treatment Plant (MWTP). The hydrogen and solar facilities site is located in an unincorporated area 10 miles east of Interstate 5, east of Los Angeles Avenue, south of W. American Avenue, west of State Route 33 (SR 33, also called S. Derrick Avenue), north of Manning Avenue, and 1.25 miles north of PG&E’s existing Tranquillity Switching Station. The tertiary wastewater treatment facility would be located within the fence line of the existing MWTP located at 3699 Bass Avenue, Mendota. The Project site includes the locations in the County and in the City.

The Applicants’ Project Description, site plan, and a location map are available for review at:

- Fresno County Public Works and Planning Department, 2220 Tulare Street, Fresno, CA 93721
- Fresno County website: www.co.fresno.ca.us/EIR

Figure 1, Project Location



SOURCE: USGS 7.5' Topographic Quadrangle (Colt Ranch, CA; Lewis, CA; Mendota Dam, CA) Heartland Hydrogen Project, 201900482

Physical Setting

The hydrogen and solar facilities site (Hydrogen-Solar Site) has been retired from irrigated agriculture due to lack of drainage services and salt accumulation in the soil; irrigation is legally precluded on many of its parcels. Over the last 15 years, the Hydrogen-Solar Site has been intermittently dry-farmed for grain or forage crops or has lain fallow. Abandoned piping and other irrigation and drainage features are present throughout the Hydrogen-Solar Site. The land does not receive an allocation of surface water from WWD. When not being dry-farmed, WWD cultivates the site to control weeds and pests. The Hydrogen-Solar Site is identified in a report by representatives of the agricultural community, solar industry, and environmental organizations as a Priority Least Conflict Area: the lowest priority for conservation of agricultural and environmental resources under the applicable classification program. Agricultural uses surround this site to the north, east, south, and west. The Adams East Solar Project is located to the east, the Tranquillity Solar Project and Tranquillity Switching Station

to the south, and individual residences to the west. The tertiary wastewater treatment facility site is within the existing MWTP, and surrounded by MWTP-related uses.

Land Use Designation

The Hydrogen-Solar Site is designated as Agriculture in the Fresno County General Plan, and zoned AE-20 (Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size) pursuant to the County's Zoning Map. The AE District is intended to be an exclusive district for agriculture and for those uses which are necessary and an integral part of the agricultural operation. This district is intended to protect the general welfare of the agricultural community from encroachments of non-related agricultural uses which by their nature, would be injurious to the physical and economic well-being of the agricultural district. County Zoning Ordinance Section 816.2, which relates to the AE Zone District, permits electric transmission substations and electric distribution stations subject to Director Review and Approval (DRA); however, the proposed use is being processed by the County under the more intensive Unclassified Conditional Use Permit application process as provided for under Section 853.B.14. The tertiary wastewater treatment facility site is designated in the City's General Plan and zoning ordinance as Public Facilities (PF).

Alternatives to be Analyzed in the EIR

Per CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the Draft EIR will assess a range of alternatives to the Project, including a No Project Alternative and any feasible 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, including from the requested variance from height restrictions;
- 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 from equipment;
- The intersection of 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, based on record searches and field surveys;
- 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.