

# 1. Introduction

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This Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) has been prepared to analyze and disclose the potentially significant environmental effects associated with the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Strauss Wind Energy Project (SWEP or Project) proposed by Strauss Wind, LLC (Applicant), which is an affiliate of BayWa r.e. Wind, LLC. This SEIR provides the primary source of environmental information for the lead, responsible, and trustee agencies to consider when exercising their permitting or approval authority related to implementation of the proposed Project.

## 1.1 Project Location, Overview, and Background

Strauss Wind, LLC, proposes to construct and operate a wind energy facility on 2,971 acres of rural land in an unincorporated area of the County of Santa Barbara, California, south of the City of Lompoc (see Figure 2-1, Project Location Map, and Figures 2-3a and 2-3b, Project Site Plan). The SWEP proposes the installation of 30 wind turbine generators (WTGs) with an electrical generating capacity of 102 megawatts (MW). The SWEP would also involve construction of various facilities required for the operation of the Project, including a substation, operation and maintenance facility, switchyard, and electrical transmission line. The components of the proposed SWEP include:

- Up to 30 WTGs,
- New access roads and improvements to existing roads,
- A communication system,
- One meteorological tower and two SODAR devices,
- On-site electrical collection lines,
- On-site substation, including a control building,
- On-site operations and maintenance (O&M) facility,
- A new 115-kilovolt electrical transmission line up to 7.3 miles in length to interconnect with Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) Company's electric grid via a new switching station,
- A new switchyard, and
- Upgrades to existing PG&E facilities.

The components of the SWEP, including its construction and operation, are described in detail in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

The Project site is the location of the previously proposed Lompoc Wind Energy Project (LWEP), which was approved by the County in 2009, but never constructed. The Applicant has purchased the LWEP and proposes changes to the previously approved project. The SWEP would involve the construction of fewer but larger WTGs than the LWEP and would have a slightly increased generating capacity. The locations of the WTGs, O&M facility and substation have been changed compared to the LWEP, and on-site road alignments have been modified. The SWEP also includes modifications to San Miguelito Road to provide necessary clearances for trucks hauling turbine components and equipment, which

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were not specified for the LWEP. The proposed alignment for the 115-kV transmission line to interconnect with the PG&E system has also been altered compared to the LWEP and a new location for the switchyard is proposed. A comparison of the SWEP and LWEP is provided in Table 2-1 and Figure 2-2.

A Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared for the LWEP and certified by the County in February 2009 (County EIR No. 06EIR-00000-00004).<sup>1</sup> The project approvals were renewed several times since the initial approvals and have since expired.<sup>2</sup> The SWEP environmental review is a supplement to the LWEP EIR. See Section 1.2.1, *Supplemental EIR*, for more information.

## **1.2 Overview of the Environmental Review Process**

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires that environmental review be conducted for projects seeking a discretionary approval from a local or State agency in California (State CEQA Guidelines §15002(b)). An EIR is an informational document required by CEQA when substantial evidence exists that a project may have a significant effect on the physical environment. An EIR is intended to provide information to decision makers, agency staff, and the public about (1) the potential environmental impacts of a project, (2) ways in which the significant effects of a project might be minimized or avoided, and (3) alternatives to the project that could reduce or avoid the significant impacts associated with the project.

The County of Santa Barbara is the Lead Agency for the SWEP, taking primary responsibility for conducting the CEQA environmental review and for approving or denying the proposed Project. This SEIR has been prepared to meet all of the substantive and procedural requirements of CEQA (California Public Resources Code Section 21000 et seq.) and the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, §15000 et seq). This SEIR will also be used by other agencies in their decision-making processes related to the proposed Project.

The sections below describe the requirements for preparing a SEIR and provides an overview of the SEIR process.

### **1.2.1 Supplemental EIR**

In reviewing SWEP application, the County determined that the proposed Project had the potential to cause significant adverse effects on the environment and, therefore, determined that the preparation of an EIR would be needed. Because an EIR had previously been prepared and certified for the LWEP, the County decided that preparation of a SEIR would be appropriate for the SWEP. A SEIR amends and modifies a previously certified EIR to make it adequate for a project that has changed since the previous EIR was prepared. Section 15162 of the State CEQA Guidelines states that subsequent EIR analysis is triggered when “Substantial changes are proposed in the project which will require major revisions of the previous EIR ... due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects.” State CEQA Guidelines Section 15163 indicates that preparation of a SEIR is appropriate in these circumstances when “Only minor

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<sup>1</sup> Project Case Nos. 06CUP-00000-00009 and 06ORD-00000-00002.

<sup>2</sup> A lawsuit was filed in Superior Court charging that the certified EIR was inadequate and that the project was improperly approved by the Board of Supervisors. The Court denied the petition, and the Appeals Court affirmed the lower court ruling.

additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation.”

Because the LWEP was a wind energy project located at the same site as the proposed SWEP, the information and impact analysis in the LWEP EIR still has substantial applicability to the SWEP. Although the layout and details of SWEP differ from those of the LWEP in various ways, the two projects include many general similarities. Therefore, this SEIR updates and modifies the environmental information and analysis for the LWEP to reflect the project revisions proposed for the SWEP.

## **1.2.2 NOP and Scoping**

In July 2018, the County filed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) with the State Clearinghouse in the Office of Planning and Research to announce the intention to prepare a Draft SEIR. The filing of the NOP initiated a 30-day period during which public and agency input was solicited on the scope of issues that should be addressed in the SEIR. As part of the scoping process, a public meeting was conducted in the City of Lompoc on July 19, 2018, to present information on the proposed Project and receive public input. Relevant comments received from agencies and members of the public in response to the NOP were considered in preparation of the Draft SEIR, as appropriate. More information on the scoping process for this SEIR is provided in Section 1.5.1.

## **1.2.3 Draft SEIR**

In accordance with CEQA, the SEIR must be completed before the Lead Agency makes any decision to approve the proposed Project. The SEIR must disclose a Project’s expected impacts on the environment, recommend feasible measures to reduce or avoid significant impacts, and analyze a reasonable range of feasible alternatives to the proposed Project. The purpose of this process is to inform the public about the impacts of the proposed Project and to provide information to agency decision makers that could aid them in their decision(s) regarding the Project.

The basic contents of an SEIR include:

- A description of the proposed Project;
- A statement of objectives;
- A description of existing conditions in the proposed Project area;
- A discussion of the potential significant environmental impacts of the proposed Project;
- Recommendations of measures that would reduce impacts of the proposed Project; and
- An evaluation of a reasonable range of feasible alternatives to the proposed Project.

One of the primary objectives of CEQA is to enhance public participation in the process of planning a project. In addition to providing information and disclosing environmental impacts, the environmental review process provides several opportunities for the public to participate through scoping, public notice, public review of the CEQA document, and public hearings. Thus, public involvement is considered an essential component of CEQA, and community members are encouraged to participate in the environmental review process, request to be notified, monitor newspapers for formal announcements, and submit substantive comments at opportunities afforded by the agency.

The Draft SEIR for the proposed Project has been distributed for public review and comment in accordance with CEQA procedures (State CEQA Guidelines §15087). Copies of the Draft SEIR were also

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submitted to the California State Clearinghouse, as well as to responsible and trustee agencies as defined by CEQA. A Notice of Availability (NOA) of the Draft SEIR was published in local newspapers and with the county clerk (State CEQA Guidelines §15087). Publishing the NOA initiated a 45-day public review period for the Draft SEIR. All comments regarding the Draft SEIR need to be received by the Lead Agency before the end of the 45-day period in order to be considered in the Final SEIR.

#### 1.2.4 Final SEIR

Responses to substantive comments received on the Draft SEIR during the 45-day public review period will be prepared by the County and published in the Final SEIR (State CEQA Guidelines §15088). The Final SEIR may also present additional information in response to the comments made on the Draft SEIR, including minor corrections or additions to the Draft SEIR, as needed.

At the end of the SEIR process, in accordance with CEQA requirements (State CEQA Guidelines § 15090), the County, as Lead Agency, will review the Final SEIR and certify the adequacy of the document prior to taking any action to approve the Project.

#### 1.2.5 Project Decision

If the Final SEIR concludes that the proposed Project would lead to one or more significant environmental effects that cannot be mitigated to a level of insignificance, the Lead Agency must make specific findings regarding its approval of the Project (State CEQA Guidelines §15091). These findings must either state that alterations have been made to the project to avoid or substantially reduce each significant impact, or that specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations make mitigation of a significant impact infeasible.

If the County decides to approve the proposed Project even though significant unavoidable impacts would occur, it must prepare and adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations (SOC) that explains why the significant and unavoidable environmental impacts associated with the Project are acceptable when compared to the benefits of other alternatives (State CEQA Guidelines §15093). If an SOC is required, it must be acted on before action to approve the proposed Project has been taken. The Lead Agency is required to file a Notice of Determination (NOD) with the California State Clearinghouse within five working days after approval of a project for which an SEIR was prepared (State CEQA Guidelines §15094).

In addition, various other agencies may need to provide approvals prior to initiation of the proposed Project (see Section 1.3, *Intended Uses of the EIR*, below). These agencies will utilize the information contained in the Final SEIR in making their decisions regarding required permits and approvals for the proposed Project.

### 1.3 Intended Uses of the SEIR

The permits and approvals necessary for construction of the proposed SWEP that are known at this time are listed in Section 2.9, *Project Approvals*. The local and State agencies issuing approvals for the proposed Project are expected to use the information in this SEIR in their decision making. This SEIR serves as the CEQA environmental review document for all discretionary permits and approvals needed to implement the SWEP.

Section 2.9 lists federal approvals that may be needed for the proposed Project. Separate environmental review under the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) may be

required for federal actions needed for Project implementation. The federal agencies responsible for issuing permits or approvals will be responsible for determining whether environmental review pursuant to NEPA is required in accordance with the NEPA implementing regulations of each agency.

## 1.4 Reader's Guide to the SEIR

This SEIR describes the components of the SWEP and discusses the significant environmental effects associated with Project construction, operation, and maintenance. The document includes the required content set forth in CEQA (Public Resources Code 21000-21189) and State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, §§15000-15387).

This section discusses some of the primary information sources used in the preparation of the SEIR, and also describes the content and organization of the SEIR to assist the reader in understanding the document.

### 1.4.1 Reference Documents

Many information sources were used in the preparation of this SEIR and these sources are referenced throughout the SEIR. The list of information sources referenced in the SEIR is presented at the end of each SEIR section.

The environmental analysis presented in the SEIR draws upon information provided in the LWEP EIR, which was certified by the County in February 2009. While that document was prepared approximately 10 years ago, it still contains relevant information regarding environmental conditions at the Project site and about Project impacts, primarily because the SWEP, similar to the LWEP, is a wind energy facility and is located on the same site as the LWEP. This SEIR updates and revises certain information and analysis in the LWEP EIR. Therefore, references to the LWEP EIR are used throughout this SEIR. For a web address to the LWEP EIR, please contact Kathy Pfeifer at [kathypm@countyofsb.org](mailto:kathypm@countyofsb.org).

As part of its application to the County for the proposed SWEP, the Applicant submitted a detailed description of the Project and its methods of construction, as well as various technical studies that provide information about existing environmental conditions and potential Project impacts. The environmental analysis presented in the SEIR utilizes information provided by the Applicant, particularly information about the proposed Project and its construction and operation. This Applicant-provided information is referenced in various sections of this SEIR. All Information provided by the Applicant was critically reviewed by County staff and the SEIR preparers before being used and, in some cases, the SEIR preparers independently verified with field work or modeling information presented. The Applicant also provided responses to information requests from the SEIR preparers to clarify and supplement information about the Project and information contained in the Applicant's technical studies.

### 1.4.2 Document Organization

This SEIR is organized as follows.

- **Summary.** A summary description of the proposed Project and its anticipated environmental impacts are included. A summary table lists impacts and the associated mitigation measures for each significant impact identified for the proposed Project.
- **Chapter 1, Introduction.** A brief overview of the proposed Project, Project location, and CEQA environmental review process are presented.

- **Chapter 2, Project Description.** A detailed description of the proposed Project is presented, including the objectives of the Project.
- **Chapter 3, Cumulative Scenario.** A list of past, present, or reasonably foreseeable future projects in the area that may have environmental effects similar to the proposed Project and, therefore, may contribute to cumulative impacts.
- **Chapter 4, Environmental Impact Analysis.** Descriptions of existing environmental conditions in the Project area and a summary of relevant laws and regulations is presented for each technical issue area. The description of existing conditions serves as the baseline environmental conditions against which the environmental effects of the Project are evaluated. Each technical issue area section provides an analysis of the proposed Project's direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts along with a conclusion regarding the significance of each identified impact. Mitigation measures are proposed to reduce or avoid significant impacts anticipated to result from Project implementation. Sections 4.1 through 4.18 address the following topics:
  - 4.1 Introduction to the Environmental Impact Analysis
  - 4.2 Aesthetics/Visual Resources
  - 4.3 Agricultural Resources
  - 4.4 Air Quality
  - 4.5 Biological Resources
  - 4.6 Cultural and Tribal Resources
  - 4.7 Energy
  - 4.8 Fire Hazards & Emergency Services
  - 4.9 Geology and Soils
  - 4.10 Greenhouse Gas Emissions
  - 4.11 Hazards and Hazardous Materials
  - 4.12 Hydrology and Water Quality
  - 4.13 Land Use and Planning
  - 4.14 Noise
  - 4.15 Paleontological Resources
  - 4.16 Recreation
  - 4.17 Transportation and Traffic
  - 4.18 Utilities and Service Systems

Some environmental topics are not addressed in the SEIR because they were determined not to be relevant to the Project or because the Project clearly has no potential impact related to certain topics. See Section 6.5 for a discussion of topics for which no significant environmental impacts are anticipated and the reasoning for these conclusions.

- **Chapter 5, Alternatives.** This chapter describes the process for the selection of Project alternatives and the rationale used to exclude certain alternatives from further analysis. The impacts of the alternatives carried forward for analysis are described, but in less detail than the impacts of the proposed Project.
- **Chapter 6, Other CEQA Considerations.** This chapter discusses certain long-term implications associated with Project implementation, including growth-inducing impacts.
- **Chapter 7, List of Preparers and Organizations/Persons Consulted.** This chapter provides a listing of information sources used in preparation of the SEIR, including persons contacted for information. The preparers of the SEIR and their roles are also listed.
- **Appendices.** Technical background information used in preparation of the SEIR is included, along with the NOP and the Initial Study.

## 1.5 Public Review and Comment

### 1.5.1 Scoping

On July 2, 2018, the County of Santa Barbara filed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft SEIR for the SWEP with the State Clearinghouse (SCH No. 2018071002), which initiated a 30-day scoping period. The NOP was also sent to various local, State, and federal agencies, and to interested organizations. The NOP provided descriptions of Project location and activities and a preliminary identification of potentially significant impacts to be addressed in the SEIR. Agencies, organizations, and the public were invited to submit comments on the scope of the SEIR, including comments on potential impacts, mitigation measures, and alternatives to be considered.

On July 19, 2018, a public scoping meeting was held in the City of Lompoc to provide an opportunity for the public and agencies to comment on the scope of the SEIR. The meeting started at 6 p.m. and was conducted in the Lompoc City Council Chambers.

The environmental issues, resources, and topics addressed in this SEIR include those identified by the County, as well as relevant concerns raised by other agencies and the public during the scoping process. CEQA requires the SEIR to focus on significant adverse impacts and, therefore, the County has evaluated the comments received during the scoping period in light of their relevance to the identification and analysis of significant impacts. Generally, the issues evaluated in this SEIR include adverse effects on the physical, biological, cultural, and other resources expected to result from implementation of the proposed Project. A summary of scoping comments received is provided in Table 1-1 below.

**Table 1-1. Summary of Scoping Comments**

Issue or Resource Area	Comments or Concerns	Where Addressed in SEIR
Aesthetics	Adverse effects on views due to the visibility of the WTGs and Transmission Line. Impacts from Project lighting.	Section 4.2 – Aesthetics
Air Quality	Include mitigation to reduce PM10 and NOx emissions.	Section 4.4 – Air Quality
Biological Resources	Potential for bird/bird kills from striking WTG blades and acoustic pressure. Consider changes in the range of the California condor. Use surveillance/curtailment technologies to reduce bird kills. Bird collisions with transmission line.	Section 4.5 – Biological Resources
Biological Resources	Project effects on wetlands. Project effects on sensitive plants.	Section 4.5 – Biological Resources
Noise	Noise effect from WTG operation on residences in the area. Consider effects of terrain on noise. Noise effect from Project-generated traffic.	Section 4.14 – Noise
Noise	Examine concussive thumping noise and sub-audible infrasound.	Section 4.14 – Noise Section 4.11 – Hazards and Hazardous Materials
Hazards	Risk that accidents may not be adequately handled by the Project's SCADA system due to the reliability/security of Project communication system.	Section 4.11 – Hazards and Hazardous Materials
Hazards	Electric and magnetic field (EMF) effects along the Project transmission line.	Section 4.11 – Hazards and Hazardous Materials
Hazards	Potential for spills from use/storage of oil on site.	Section 4.11 – Hazards and Hazardous Materials

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**Table 1-1. Summary of Scoping Comments**

Issue or Resource Area	Comments or Concerns	Where Addressed in SEIR
Public Services	Effect on emergency response times due to modifications of San Miguelito Road.	Section 4.8 – Fire and Emergency Services
Transportation	Will modifications to San Miguelito Road encroach onto private property?	Chapter 2 – Project Description
Transportation	Effect of San Miguelito Road modifications on traffic and circulation.	Section 4.17 – Transportation and Traffic
Alternatives	Consider transport of MTG blades by rail or helicopter to reduce traffic impacts and avoid modifications to San Miguelito Road.	Chapter 5 – Alternatives
Alternatives	Consolidate Project transmission line with existing power lines.	Chapter 5 – Alternatives
Alternatives	Consider the use of segmented (two-piece) blades to reduce transportation impacts and avoid modifications to San Miguelito Rd.	Chapter 5 – Alternatives

Please note that CEQA does not permit social or economic effects to be treated as significant impacts and, therefore, no significance conclusions are presented in this SEIR for such effects (State CEQA Guidelines §15131).

The County has endeavored to address a broad range of issues, resources, and topics in this SEIR, including concerns raised during the scoping comment period. However, for various reasons, not all comments received during the scoping process are addressed. Some comments did not pertain to environmental issues associated with the proposed Project and, therefore, have not been addressed. Some comments have not been addressed because they were not substantive, meaning that they did not present information that is meaningful to the environmental analysis. Examples of non-substantive comments include expressions of opposition to or support for the proposed Project, expressions of disagreement with adopted public policies, or comments that are vague or open ended (e.g., “put the project somewhere else” or “the project will be harmful to the area”). Such non-substantive comments are not required to be addressed in the SEIR.

### 1.5.2 Public Comments on the Draft SEIR

This Draft SEIR was distributed for public review and comment in accordance with procedures specified in CEQA. A Notice of Completion along with copies of the Draft SEIR were filed with the State Clearinghouse, which initiated a 45-day public review period for the Draft SEIR. Comments may be submitted on the Draft SEIR during this public review period. Comments received during the 45-day public review period will be included in the Final SEIR along with responses to the comments received. All comments on the Draft SEIR must be received by the Lead Agency before the end of the 45-day period in order to be considered in the Final SEIR. An environmental hearing to receive comments on the SWEP SEIR will be conducted on May 30, 2019, at 6 p.m. in the Lompoc City Council Chambers.

**Comments.** Written comments must be submitted by 5:00 p.m. on June 7, 2019. Written comments on the Draft SEIR may be submitted to the following mailing address:

Kathy Pfeifer, Planner  
 Santa Barbara County Planning & Development  
 123 East Anapamu Street  
 Santa Barbara, CA 93101

Comments may also be submitted via the following e-mail address: [kathypm@countyofsb.org](mailto:kathypm@countyofsb.org)

Please focus your comments on topics related to impacts on the physical environment.



## 1.6 Post-SEIR Project Changes

The information about the proposed Project that serves as the basis for the impact analysis in this SEIR is derived from application materials, digital location data supplied by the Applicant, and information provided by the Applicant in response to information requests from the SEIR preparers. While this information is detailed, it does not represent final engineering data, and construction-level plans have not been prepared for the Project. Therefore, if the Project is approved, some changes in Project details are expected after the SEIR is finalized and approvals are granted. Such changes might involve minor alignment changes, changes in component details, minor changes in material quantities, and other details that will not be finalized until construction plans are completed. These types of changes are normal and expected for almost any type of construction project because CEQA analysis is based on preliminary project information rather than final design. Such project changes do not invalidate the analysis in the SEIR nor necessarily trigger the need for supplemental environmental analysis. Supplemental analysis is generally only needed when there are substantial changes to a project or the circumstances under which a project will be undertaken such that significant adverse impacts would be substantially more severe than described in the original EIR. (See State CEQA Guidelines §15162).

CEQA recognizes that detailed project information, such as construction plans, is not required for preparation of an EIR. Section 15124 of the State CEQA Guidelines states that an EIR should contain a “general description” of a project’s characteristics and “should not supply extensive detail beyond that needed for evaluation and review of the environmental impact.” Further, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15004(b) states that an EIR “should be prepared as early as feasible in the planning process to enable environmental considerations to influence project ... design.”

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