

## NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Clearinghouse  
PO Box 3044/1400 Tenth St  
Sacramento, CA 95814

From: County of Tulare – RMA  
5961 S Mooney Blvd  
Visalia, CA 93277

Date: February 14, 2020

Subject: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Scoping Meeting

Project Title: Rexford Solar Farm

Project Applicant: 20SD 8ME LLC

Project Location: The Project is located on approximately 3,782 acres of land near the unincorporated community of Ducor, a census-designated place, in south-central Tulare County. The Project site is generally located south of Avenue 68, west of Road 272, north of Avenue 12, and east of Road 216. The majority of the Project site is bisected by and lies east of State Route 65. The Project is located in the Ducor and Richgrove U.S. Geological Survey 7.5-minute topographic quadrangles. The Public Lands Survey System maps the area as Township 23 south, Range 27 east, Sections 20-23, and 25-36; Township 23 south, Range 28 east, Sections 30, 31; and Township 24 south, Range 27 east, Sections 01- 04, 08-11, 15-22, and 27-29.

Tulare County Resource Management Agency (RMA) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an environmental impact report (EIR) for the project identified below. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the proposed project. Your agency will need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit(s) or other approval(s) for the project. In addition, please provide us with contact information of the person(s) in your agency that we may contact during the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process.

The project description, location, and the potential environmental effects are contained in the attached materials. The NOP is also available on the County website beginning on February 14, 2020 at: <https://tularecounty.ca.gov/rma/index.cfm/planning-building/environmental-planning/environmental-impact-reports/rexford-solar-project-19-073/>.

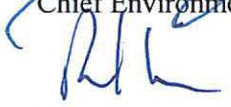
Due to the limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice.

A scoping meeting is scheduled for **Thursday, March 5, 2020 at 1:30 P.M.** in the Main Conference Room of the Tulare County Resource Management Agency at the address shown above.

*Notice of Preparation and Scoping Meeting  
Rexford Solar Farm Project  
February 14, 2020*

Please direct your response to Hector Guerra, Chief Environmental Planner at the address shown above. He may be contacted by e-mail at hguerra@co.tulare.ca.us or by telephone at 559-624-7121.

Signature:  Date: 2/13/20  
Hector Guerra  
Title: Chief Environmental Planner

Signature:  Date: 2/13/2020  
Reed Schenke, P.E.  
Title: RMA Director / Environmental Assessment Officer

*Reference: California Code of Regulations, Title 14, (CEQA Guidelines) Sections 15082(a), 15103, 15375*

## **PROJECT LOCATION AND SETTING**

The proposed Rexford Solar Farm (Project) would be located on approximately 3,782 acres of land near the unincorporated community of Ducor, a census-designated place, in south-central Tulare County (Figure 1). Neighboring unincorporated communities include Terra Bella to the north and Richgrove to the southwest. As shown on Figure 2, the Project site is generally located south of Avenue 68, west of Road 272, north of Avenue 12, and east of Road 216. The majority of the Project site is bisected by and east of State Route (SR) 65.

The Project is located in the Ducor and Richgrove U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-minute topographic quadrangles. The Public Lands Survey System maps the area as Township 23 south, Range 27 east, Sections 20-23, and 25-36; Township 23 south, Range 28 east, Sections 30, 31; and Township 24 south, Range 27 east, Sections 01- 04, 08-11, 15-22, and 27-29.

Elevations within the Project site range from 475-670 feet (145-205 meters) above mean sea level. The Project site is surrounded by existing agricultural uses including dry-land grain, irrigated crops, and grazing lands and scattered rural residences and agricultural-related structures. The portion of the Project site located south of the White River is surrounded by the Tulare Solar Center facility.

The majority of the Project site is zoned as AE-40 (Exclusive Agriculture – 40 acre minimum), with exception of the northernmost parcels (APN Nos. 321-040-007, -008, -011, and -025) which are zoned AE-10 (Exclusive Agriculture – 10 acre minimum). The Project site is designated as Extensive Agriculture, Valley Agricultural, and Valley Agriculture Extension by the Tulare County General Plan. These General Plan and zoning designations expressly allow the installation of renewable solar power with a Special Use Permit.

## **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

In accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Pub. Resources Code §21000 et seq.), the County of Tulare Resource Management Agency (RMA) will be preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to evaluate the environmental effects associated with the construction and operation of an up to 700 megawatt alternative current (MW AC) solar photovoltaic (PV) facility and an up to 700 MW AC energy storage system (ESS) on approximately 3,782 gross acres of land (on 40 discontinuous parcels) in unincorporated south-central Tulare County, California. The proposed Project would include a ground mounted PV solar power generating system, supporting structures, inverter modules, pad mounted transformers, ESS, access roads and fencing, and on-site substation. An operations and maintenance building may be constructed on the site.

The proposed Project would involve the construction of both transmission and collector lines. Power generated by the proposed Project would be transmitted to the Southern California Edison (SCE) Vestal Substation via an up to 230 kilovolt (kV) overhead and/or underground gen-tie line. The proposed transmission and/or collector lines would extend along existing roadway rights-of-way from various portions of the Project site (where substations are located) ultimately connecting to the Southern California Edison Vestal Substation. The transmission and/or collector lines would be located along portions of Road 232, Avenue 56, Avenue 64, Road 224, Road 240, Avenue 32, Richgrove Drive, and SR 65, or could possibly utilize additional nearby routings. The total length of the transmission and/or collector lines would be approximately 13 miles in length.

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Rexford Solar Farm Project  
February 14, 2020*

If you require additional information related to this notice, please contact:

Hector Guerra, Chief Environmental Planner at:  
E-mail: [hguerra@co.tulare.ca.us](mailto:hguerra@co.tulare.ca.us); or  
Phone: (559) 624-7121

**REVIEWING AGENCIES AND POTENTIAL APPROVALS REQUIRED:**

The following agencies may have jurisdiction/interests concerning the proposed Project:

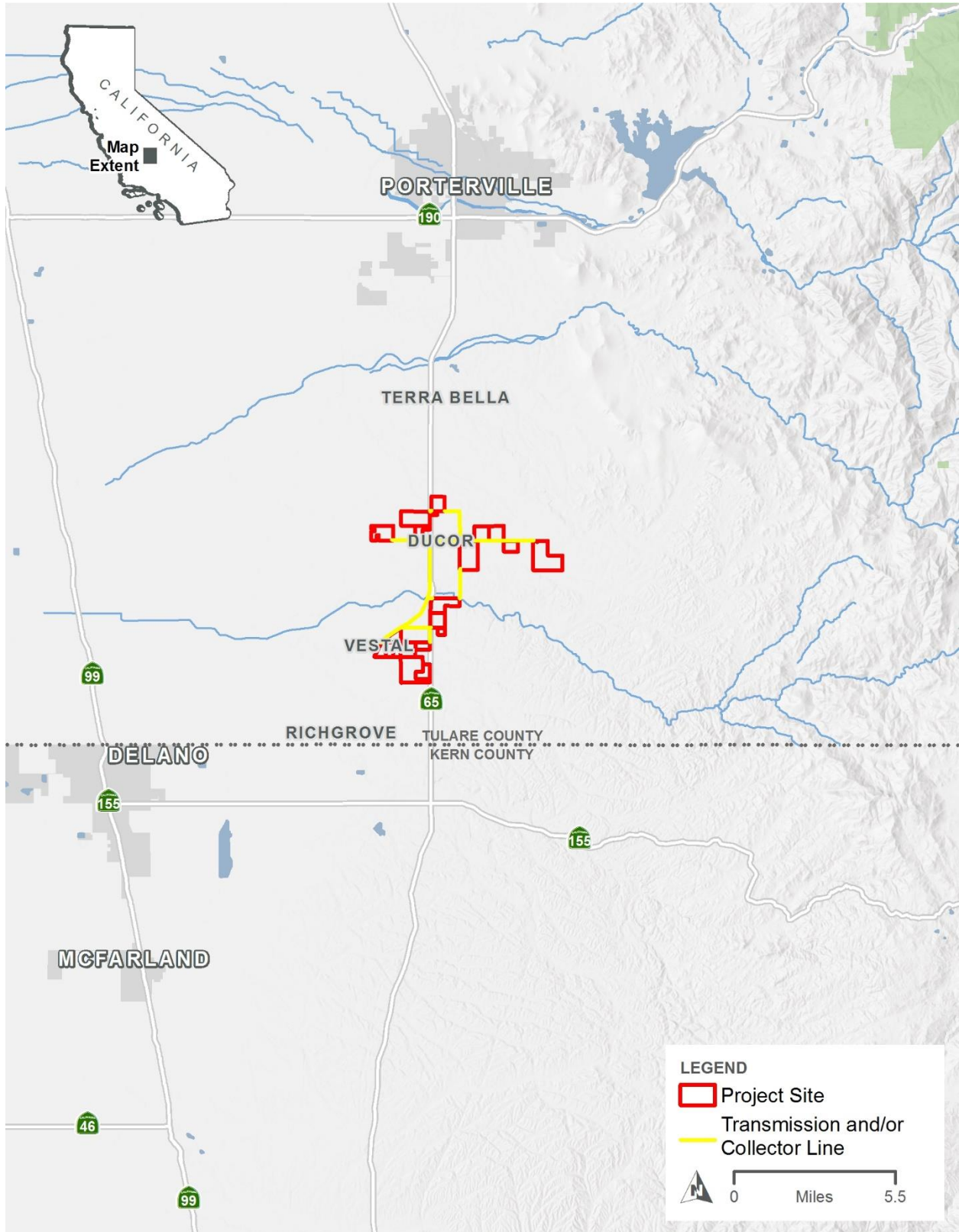
**Regional, State and Federal:**

- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- California Department of Conservation – Division of Land Resource Protection
- California Department of Fish and Wildlife – Region #4
- Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board – Region #5
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans)
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District
- California Energy Commission
- California Public Utilities Commission

**Local:**

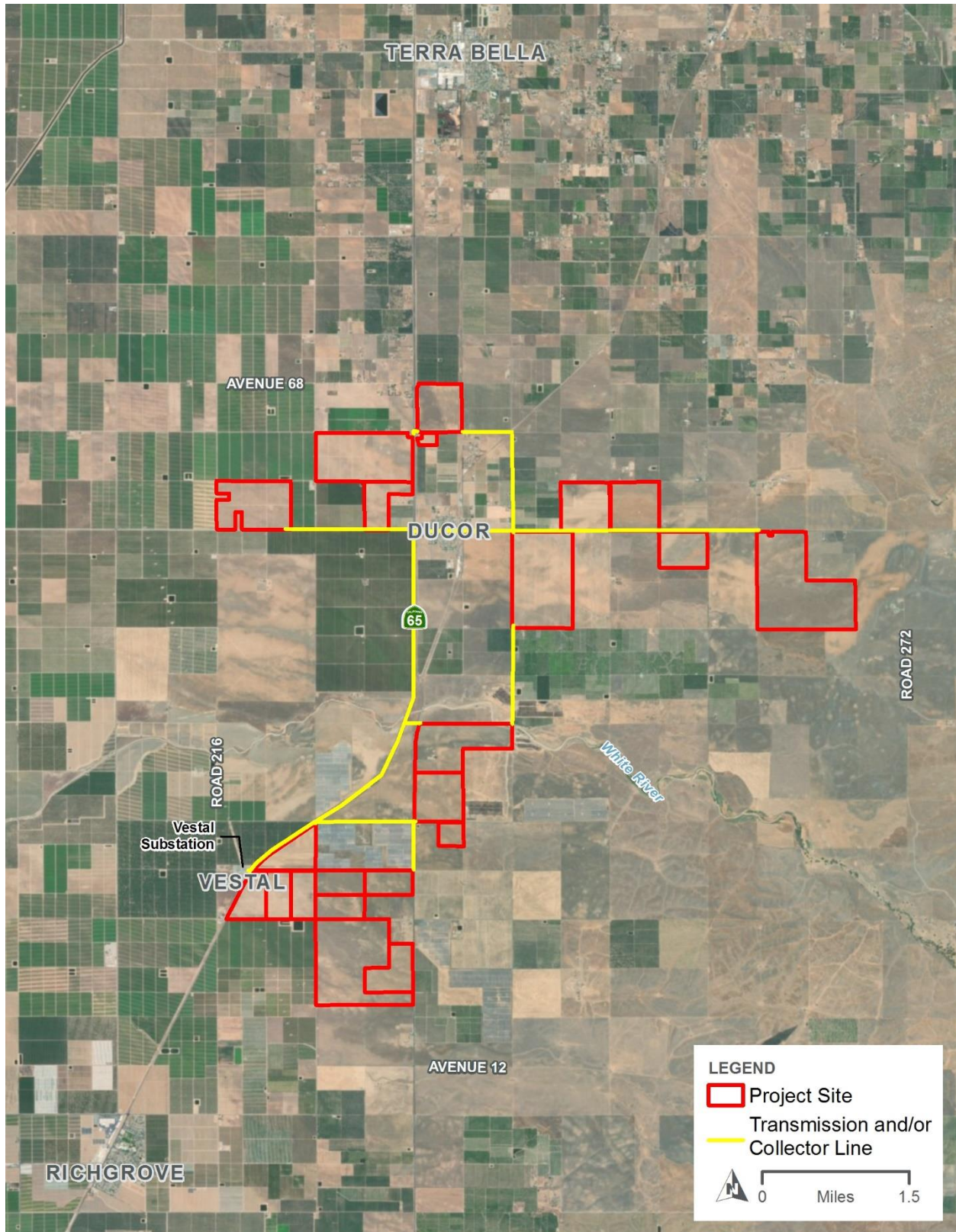
- Tulare County Resource Management Agency
- Tulare County Environmental Health and Human Services Agency
- Tulare County Flood Control
- Tulare County Fire
- Planning Branch (Environmental Planning, Project Review, Building and Housing Divisions)
- Public Works Branch

Figure 1. Regional Location Map





**Figure 2. Vicinity Map**



## **SUMMARY OF POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS**

The EIR will evaluate, among other things, the probable direct and cumulative environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of the solar energy facility and associated infrastructure. Mitigation measures will be recommended, where feasible, to mitigate potentially significant impacts. The proposed Project will be evaluated on its own merits, resource specific facts, and determinations; therefore, a project specific environmental document will be prepared. The following issues are proposed for analysis in the EIR:

### **Aesthetics**

The Project is located in a generally rural area surrounded by existing agricultural uses including dry-land grain, irrigated crops, and grazing lands and scattered residential buildings. The placement of PV solar panels and associated structures on the Project site would alter the existing character of the Project site and vicinity. The majority of the Project site is bisected by State Route 65. Residents and travelers on adjacent roads would observe alterations to the existing landscape. The EIR will provide an assessment of Project impacts to visual resources, as well as lighting and glare impacts.

### **Agriculture and Forestry Resources**

The entire Project site is designated as Farmland of Local Importance by the California Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. The Project site is surrounded by existing agricultural uses including dry-land grain, irrigated crops, and grazing lands. The majority of the Project site is under Williamson Act contracts. The EIR will provide an assessment of potential Project related impacts to agricultural resources.

### **Air Quality / Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

The EIR will describe regional and local air quality in the vicinity of the proposed Project site and evaluate impacts to air quality associated with the construction and operation of the Project. An air quality study will be prepared to establish baseline conditions, and project and cumulative impacts. The proposed Project's estimated air emissions will be compared to emissions thresholds of the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District. The EIR will describe existing air quality conditions within the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin and will evaluate the proposed Project's potential air quality impacts. Potential air quality emissions include fugitive dust and combustion exhaust. The EIR will also include a discussion of greenhouse gas emissions and the proposed Project's contribution to potential cumulative impacts on global climate change.

### **Biological Resources**

Construction of the proposed Project may modify biotic habitats used by sensitive plant and wildlife species. As such, site development may be regulated by state or federal agencies, subject to the provisions of CEQA, and/or covered by policies and ordinances of Tulare County. A biological resources report will be prepared to address issues related to: 1) the potential for sensitive biological resources occurring on the Project site; 2) the federal, state, and local laws regulating such resources; and 3) mitigation measures that may be required to reduce the magnitude of anticipated impacts and/or comply with permit requirements of state and federal resource agencies. The proposed Project's potential to impact biological resources will be analyzed in the EIR.

### **Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources**

Although the proposed Project will be constructed on previously disturbed land, it cannot be definitively concluded that cultural resources are absent. A search of the Southern San Joaquin Valley Information

Center California Historical Resources Information System (CHRIS) was conducted. The records search identified 10 cultural resources documented within a 0.5-mile radius of the Project site. Six of the 10 resources are recorded within the Project site.

A Sacred Land File (SLF) Search was submitted to the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) on October 3, 2019. The NAHC responded on October 8, 2019, stating that the SLF search was completed with “negative” results. The NAHC provided a list of tribes that are traditionally and culturally affiliated with the Project area. The County will fulfill its obligations consistent with tribal consultation pursuant to Assembly Bill 52 using the list provided by the NAHC. In addition, portions of the Project site are located within relative proximity to the White River, which has been known to be associated with cultural resource sites. Depending upon responses from tribal consultation, a cultural resources evaluation may be prepared for this Project. The EIR will examine the proposed Project’s potential to affect cultural resources and Tribal cultural resources.

### **Energy**

The EIR will include an analysis of the Project’s potential to result in impacts on energy conservation and/or consumption.

### **Geology/Soils and Mineral Resources**

Initial construction, buildout, and operation of the proposed Project on the Project site could result in impacts related to geotechnical hazards, including seismicity of the area, potential for liquefaction and subsidence, potential for soil erosion, soil stability characteristics, and shrink/swell potential of site soils, as applicable.

Mineral resources located in south Tulare County are predominantly sand and gravel resources near waterways. A portion of the Project site (APN No. 339-050-004) is located immediately adjacent to the White River. The White River is mapped as MRZ-3a, which are areas considered to have a moderate potential for the discovery of economic mineral deposits.

It is currently unknown whether the proposed Project site soils have the potential to contain paleontological resources. If such resources exist on the site, ground-disturbing activities could result in potentially significant impacts. A geological evaluation of the proposed Project site will be conducted to establish baseline, project, and cumulative impacts related to geology, soils, mineral resources, and paleontological resources.

### **Greenhouse Gas Emissions**

The temporary construction activities associated with the proposed Project, which would involve operation of heavy off-road equipment, on-road trucks, and construction worker commute trips, would generate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. However, as a solar facility, the proposed Project is expected to displace traditional sources of electricity production that involves combustion energy sources (e.g., burning coal, fuel oil, or natural gas). As such, the provision of solar energy by the proposed Project would produce GHG-free electricity that is anticipated to offset GHGs that would otherwise be generated by traditional sources of electricity. The potential impacts associated with GHG emissions generated during construction of the Project and the potential GHG offsets resulting from operation of the Project will be evaluated in the EIR. The proposed Project’s estimated greenhouse gas emissions will be evaluated for consistency with the Tulare County 2030 General Plan, the Tulare County Climate Action Plan, and the State’s 2017 Scoping Plan.



### **Hazards and Hazardous Materials**

There are no known hazards or hazardous materials located within the proposed Project site, nor is the proposed Project site located on a Cortese List site. The EIR will evaluate the potential for the proposed Project to result in, or be affected by, impacts associated with hazards and hazardous materials.

### **Hydrology/Water Quality**

According to the Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) prepared by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (Map Number 06107C1975E and 06107C2325E), the majority of the Project site is located within Zone X. Zone X is an area determined to be outside the 0.2 percent annual chance floodplain. Portions of the solar farm site (APNs 339-050-004, 339-050-013, and 339-070-026) and transmission/collector line near the White River are mapped as Zone A. Zone A is an area subject to a 1 percent or greater annual chance of flooding in any given year. The EIR will analyze the proposed Project's impacts on hydrology and water quality.

### **Land Use/Planning**

The EIR will describe the proposed Project's potential effects on existing and planned uses. The majority of the Project site is zoned as AE-40 (Exclusive Agriculture – 40 acre minimum), with exception of the northernmost parcels (APN Nos. 321-040-007, -008, -011, and -025) which are zoned AE-10 (Exclusive Agriculture – 10 acre minimum). The Project site is designated as Extensive Agriculture, Valley Agricultural, and Valley Agriculture Extension by the Tulare County General Plan. These General Plan and zoning designations expressly allow the installation of renewable solar power with a Special Use Permit; however, the EIR will provide a discussion of relevant local plans and policies because conflicts could potentially result in environmental impacts.

### **Noise**

The EIR will describe the noise levels associated with proposed Project construction and operations and will compare these levels to applicable noise thresholds to determine whether the proposed Project would result in a significant noise impact. A noise study will be prepared to establish baseline, project, and cumulative impacts.

### **Population/Housing**

The EIR will evaluate the Project's effect on population and housing in the local area based on estimations of Project employment and distribution of the employees by place of residence.

### **Public Services**

The EIR will evaluate the proposed Project's potential to create an adverse impact to schools, and will also evaluate effects on local police and fire services along with parks and regional recreational facilities.

### **Recreation**

Although unlikely due to the nature of the proposed Project, the increase in use of parks and other recreational facilities near the vicinity of the Project will be analyzed in the EIR.

### **Transportation/Traffic**

The EIR will evaluate the proposed Project's impact on regional and local transportation facilities based on a transportation analysis that will assess both construction-related impacts (heavy truck trips and construction worker trips), as well as operational impacts (employee and visitor trips). Impacts to roadways would be limited to construction-related activities of the Project. Construction-related vehicles would primarily access the Project site from State Route 65, and may also utilize county roads including, but not limited to, Richgrove Drive, Avenue 24, and Avenue 56. The Tulare County General Plan 2030 Update considers Level of Service (LOS) D as the minimum acceptable LOS standard during peak hours for County roadways and intersections. According to Caltrans' SR 65 Transportation Concept Report dated June 2002, the acceptable Concept LOS is C for SR 65. A traffic impact study will be prepared to establish a baseline, and to evaluate project and cumulative impacts for the proposed Project in consultation with the County of Tulare, the Tulare County Association of Governments, and Caltrans. Similarly, the EIR will examine alternative traffic distribution.

### **Utilities/Service Systems**

The proposed Project would not require extension/connection to urban services such as potable water service, wastewater treatment, and stormwater drainage. However, the EIR will analyze drainage, water, wastewater, natural gas, and electrical systems and the proposed Project's impact on these systems. The EIR will also describe the existing solid waste facilities that serve the Project site.

### **Wildfire**

According to the Fire Hazard Severity Zones map published by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CalFire), the portions of the Project site located east of State Route 65 are within a State Responsibility Area classified as having moderate potential for wildfires. The EIR will evaluate the proposed Project's impacts related to wildfire.

### **GROWTH INDUCEMENT**

The EIR will evaluate the proposed Project's potential for growth inducement resulting from the construction and operation of the solar energy facility, as well as new demand for housing, and goods and services. The effect of primary and secondary increases in employment and economic activity will be discussed.

### **CUMULATIVE IMPACTS**

The EIR will discuss the incremental contribution of the proposed Project to cumulative effects of other past, current, and planned and reasonably foreseeable Projects in the vicinity. The summary of projects method will be used where applicable. Also, to the extent feasible, the Cumulative Impacts section will quantify the degree of severity of any cumulative impact.

### **ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED IN THE EIR**

In accordance with the CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the EIR will describe a reasonable range of alternative to the proposed Project that are capable of meeting most of the proposed Project's objectives, but would avoid or substantially lessen any of the significant effects of the proposed Project. The EIR will also identify any alternatives that were considered but rejected by the Lead Agency as infeasible and briefly explain the reasons why. The EIR will also provide an analysis of the No Project Alternative.

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**OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

Interested individuals, groups, and agencies may provide to the County of Tulare Resource Management Agency, Planning Branch, written comments on topics to be addressed in the EIR for the proposed Project. Because of time limits mandated by state law, comments should be provided no later than **5:00 p.m. March 16, 2020**. Agencies that will need to use the EIR when considering permits or other approvals for the proposed Project should provide the name of a staff contact person. Please send all comments to:

**Hector Guerra, Chief Environmental Planner  
Tulare County Resource Management Agency  
Economic Development and Planning Branch  
5961 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia, CA 93277-9394  
E-mail: [hguerra@co.tulare.ca.us](mailto:hguerra@co.tulare.ca.us)  
Phone: (559) 624-7121**