# County of San Bernardino

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT EIR AND SCOPING MEETING



**DATE**: July 6, 2021

To: Responsible Agencies and Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Scoping Meeting

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County of San Bernardino (County) must conduct a review of the environmental impacts of the Lockhart Solar PV II Project (project). Implementation of the project will require discretionary approvals from state and local agencies, and therefore, the project is subject to the environmental review requirements of CEQA. As the lead agency under CEQA, and due to the involvement of potentially significant impacts to the environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project.

**PROJECT TITLE:** Lockhart Solar PV II Project

PROJECT APPLICANT: Lockhart Solar PV II, LLC

# ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBERS: 0490-101-54, 0490-101-56, and 0490-223-33

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Lockhart Solar PV II Project (Project) includes development of a utility scale, solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation and energy storage facility that would produce up to 150 megawatts (MW) of solar power and include up to 4 gigawatt hours (GWh) of energy storage capacity rate in a battery energy storage system (BESS) on up to approximately 690 acres of land. The Project will be processed under three separate Conditional Use Permits (CUPs), described below. The Project is bordered on the south by the approved Lockhart Solar I Facility. The Project would share existing operations and maintenance facilities (i.e. O&M building, warehouse and employee building), water and septic systems, as well as switchyard and electrical transmission infrastructure, and a new collector substation (approved and to be constructed) within the Lockhart Solar I Facility site to connect the Project to the existing transmission line which runs to the SCE-owned Kramer Junction substation. The Project is largely sited on land previously approved by the California Energy Commission (CEC) for development of Solar Energy Generating System X (SEGS X), a solar thermal power facility which was never fully constructed. The Project Site has been subject to near complete surface disturbance associated with past agricultural use, grading during partial construction of the SEGS X facility, as well as construction of the shared facilities area for the existing SEGS VIII and IX Solar Thermal Power Plants. Development includes demolition of existing SEGS X concrete foundations (as needed) to allow for construction of Project facilities.

## **Project Objectives**

The Project would provide San Bernardino County and the State of California with additional renewable energy sources on previously disturbed land that would assist the state in complying with the Renewables Portfolio Standard under Senate Bill 100 which requires that by December

31, 2030, 60% of all electricity sold in the state shall be generated from renewable energy sources. The following are the Project objectives:

- Develop a power-generating facility with solar PV and energy storage on previously graded and disturbed land.
- Establish solar PV power-generating facilities and energy storage of sufficient size and configuration to produce reliable electricity in an economically feasible and commercially financeable manner that can be marketed to different power utility companies.
- Use proven and established PV and energy storage technology that is efficient and requires low maintenance.
- Assist California in meeting greenhouse gas emission reduction goals by 2030 as required by the California Global Warming Solutions Act (Assembly Bill 32), as amended by Senate Bill 32 in 2016.
- Meets the County's Renewable Energy and Conservation Element (RECE) requirements by not being in or near adopted Community Plan areas or in Rural Living land use districts.

# Project Site

The Project Site is in unincorporated Hinkley, CA, approximately 7 miles north of the intersection of Harper Lake Road and Mojave-Barstow Highway 58. The Project Site consists of three parcels, each of which contain vacant, previously disturbed land or miscellaneous concrete foundations and various electrical lines and poles. The Project Site is bordered on the south by the existing SEGS VIII and IX Solar Thermal Power Plants, which the County approved for repowering to PV solar and battery storage in 2019 as part of the Lockhart Solar I Facility (CUP Project #201900125 approved in 2019), Harper Lake Road to the east; Hoffman Road to the west; and vacant land to the north. Vehicular access is provided via Harper Lake Road and a private road through the Lockhart Solar I Facility site.

# Project Background

During the late-1980s, construction of the SEGS X solar thermal facility was initiated on the Project Site. SEGS X was part of a series of three solar thermal power plants certified by the CEC which were to be built adjacent to each other in order to share supporting facilities. SEGS X was fully permitted and certified as an 80-megawatt solar thermal facility. Approximately 600-acres were identified for the SEGS X power plant including land for associated facilities to be shared with the two adjacent solar thermal power plants (SEGS VIII and IX). Per the SEGS IX and X CEC certification, permanent impacts to loss of high-quality habitats were mitigated through purchase of 1,680 acres of conservation land at a 5 to 1 ratio for both Mohave ground squirrel and desert tortoise, pursuant to the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), now known as the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), requirements and approvals. All of these mitigation lands were protected even though the SEGS X project was never fully constructed.

In 1991, the SEGS X owner was unable to continue construction due to lack of financing and construction was halted. Prior to work stoppage, several concrete foundations for the power block as well as concrete foundations for solar racking had been installed in portions of the Project Site. The Lockhart Solar PV II Project, as outlined below, proposes to use these already disturbed parcels and the CDFW conservation lands already protected to construct a solar PV and BESS facility.

# **Project Overview and Design**

The Project includes the development of solar PV facilities, BESS, and associated infrastructure with the capacity to generate up to 150 MW of solar energy and up to 4 GWh of energy storage capacity rate. The previously installed SEGS X concrete foundations will be removed if the foundations conflict with installation of Project facilities; they will otherwise be left in place. Concrete from SEGS X foundations would be demolished and exported from the site for proper disposal at a licensed landfill. Previously constructed concrete solar racking piers in the southwest portion of the site will remain in place as newer steel foundation piles can be driven around the old piers further reducing soil disturbance and offsite hauling and landfilling of debris.

Existing operations and maintenance buildings, warehouse and the employee building within the Lockhart Solar I Facility would be shared by Project operations staff. These shared facilities are located within the approximately 110-acre "Shared Facilities Area" within the Lockhart Solar I Facility site. The Project would also be served by shared, and already approved, water and septic systems within the adjacent Lockhart Solar I Facility site to the south. The Shared Facilities Area includes the already approved BESS for Lockhart Solar I and the new BESS for Lockhart Solar PV II, as these facilities are integral to the collector substation. In addition, the already approved collector substation and the existing switchyard located at the Lockhart Solar I Facility site will be upgraded, as necessary, to connect the Project to the existing transmission line which runs to SCE-owned Kramer Junction substation as a shared facility. The Project is subject to conditional use permit approval. In anticipation that power from the project may be sold to different off-takers and/or may be financed by separate entities, the Applicant is requesting three CUPs be approved<sup>1</sup>. This will allow for the site to be divided to deliver power to multiple off-takers as well as enable financing required for the Project. Each of the three CUPs include facilities sharing, as described above, within the Shared Facilities Area.

The Project consists of the following components:

**CUP 1: Solar PV Generating Facilities and Solar Modules:** CUP 1 covers an approximately 560-acre area and includes installation of solar facilities capable of generating up to 135 MW of renewable electrical energy via PV modules made of thin film or polycrystalline silicon material covered by glass, mounted on a single-axis tracking system and connected to inverters and to the BESS. Depending on the type of modules used, panels would measure between approximately 4 and 7 feet in length, and the total height of the panel system measured from the ground surface would be approximately 7 to 12 feet. Single-axis systems would employ a motor mechanism that would allow the arrays to track the path of the sun throughout the day. CUP 1 also includes extension of the existing open channel berm along the western and northern boundary of the CUP 1 area for collection and routing of offsite run-on.

**CUP 2: Solar PV Generating Facilities and Solar Modules:** CUP 2 covers an approximately 80-acre area and includes installation of solar facilities capable of generating up to 15 MW of renewable electrical energy via PV modules made of thin film or polycrystalline silicon material covered by glass, mounted on a single-axis tracking system and connected to inverters and to the BESS. Depending on the type of modules used, panels would measure between approximately 4 and 7 feet in length, and the total height of the panel system measured from the ground surface would be approximately 7 to 12 feet. Single-axis systems would employ a motor mechanism that would allow the arrays to track the path of the sun throughout the day.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Refer to the CUP Area Map for the location of each requested CUP area.

• CUP 3: Battery Energy Storage System (BESS): The BESS system is proposed to be permitted under its own CUP (CUP #3) within up to 50-acres of the 110-acre Shared Facilities Area. The Project would install a battery energy storage system and associated equipment to provide the ability to store up to 4 GWh of energy storage capacity rate for the electric grid. All of the proposed BESS would be installed within up to approximately 50-acres within the Shared Facilities Area (refer to Plot Plan). The Applicant proposes to install the BESS components in phases over the life of this CUP, for an installed capacity of up to 4 GWh of energy storage capacity rate.

The batteries would be stored in individual containers; dimensions of the containers would be up to approximately 51 feet in length, 14 feet in width and 21.6 feet in height, including height needed for HVAC. The batteries would be housed in open-air-style racking within its enclosed container (similar to computer racking). The associated inverters, transformers, and switchgear would be located immediately adjacent to the individual containers on concrete pads or on pier mounted skids.

The BESS containers would have a fire rating in conformance with County standards and specialized fire suppression systems. The containers would also have HVAC cooling to maintain energy efficiency and to protect the batteries. Power to the HVAC, lighting, etc. would be provided via a connection to the permitted, but not yet constructed, collector substation service transformer within the Shared Facilities Area with connection lines installed above ground and/or below ground. The BESS would be operated primarily via remote control with onsite periodic inspections and maintenance performed, as necessary. The energy storage technology has not been determined at this time but could include any commercially available and proved large-scale battery technology, including but not limited to lithium iron, lead acid, sodium sulfur, and sodium or nickel hydride. Power stored by the BESS would be gathered into 34.5 kV circuits and be stepped-up to 230 kV at the substation.

- Upgrade of Shared Collector Substation and Switchyard: The collector substation permitted, but not yet constructed, and the existing switchyard located in the Shared Facilities Area will be upgraded, as necessary, to serve the Lockhart Solar PV II Project (refer to Plot Plan). The existing switchyard currently serves the SEGS VIII and IX solar thermal facilities. This type of facilities sharing lessens the overall environmental impacts of this development and further reduces redundancy.
- Electrical Collector System and Inverters: Overhead and underground collection systems will be built throughout the solar facilities. Collection systems would be aggregated at multiple circuit breakers or medium-voltage switchgear positions, leading to the permitted, but not yet constructed, shared collector substation located in the Shared Facilities Area.
- Shared Gen-Tie Power Line and Interconnection with the Statewide Grid: A 230 kV on-site gen-tie will connect the power generated from this Project to the existing switchyard located at the southern edge of the Shared Facilities Area. From there, an existing 13.8-mile gen-tie transmission line will be used to transmit the power generated from the Project to the existing SCE-owned substation at Kramer Junction (a shared facility).
- **Telecommunication Facilities:** Telecommunication equipment, including underground and overhead fiber optics, microwave, and meteorological data collection systems or supervisory control and data acquisition would be installed.

• Site Access, Security, and Lighting: Existing security fencing and electronic gate will be used for the Project. On-site access roads, perimeter security fencing and installed nighttime directional lighting would provide site access and security.

# Construction

## Schedule and Workforce

Project construction is anticipated to be completed over a period of up to approximately 14 months. Project construction activities generally fall into three main categories: (1) site preparation, (2) system installation, and (3) testing, commissioning, and cleanup.

The on-site construction workforce is expected to peak at approximately 340 individuals; however, the average daily workforce on-site is expected to be between 225 and 250 construction, supervisory, support, and construction management personnel. Construction would primarily occur during daylight hours, Monday through Friday, between 7:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m., as required to meet the construction schedule. Any construction work performed outside of the normal work schedule would be coordinated with the appropriate agencies and would conform to the County Noise Ordinance.

#### Site Grading and Earthwork

Site grading and earthwork activities are expected to include mowing, excavation, and piledriving. Grading of the Project Site would be limited to the greatest extent possible to control dust. Micro-grading would occur to maintain pile foundation tolerances and grading would be required for installation of site roads and preparation of equipment foundation pads. Solar panels are attached to driven piles and do not require foundation pads. Grading is also anticipated along the western and northern boundary of the Project Site to extend the existing open channel berm for the collection and routing of offsite run-on. Flows would be discharged to the existing watershed which drains toward Harper Dry Lake. Site preparation and construction would occur in accordance with all federal, state, and County zoning codes and requirements. Noise-generating construction activities would be limited to the construction hours noted above.

All applicable local, state, and federal requirements and best management practices (BMPs) would be incorporated into Project construction activities. The construction contractor would be required to incorporate BMPs consistent with the County zoning ordinance and with guidelines provided in the California Stormwater Quality Association's Construction Best Management Practice Handbook, including the preparation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan and a Soil Erosion and Sedimentation Control Plan to reduce potential impacts related to construction of the Project.

## Solar Array Assembly

Erection of the solar arrays would include support structures and associated electrical equipment and cabling. During this work, there would be multiple crews working on the site with various equipment and vehicles, including special vehicles for transporting the modules and other equipment. As the solar arrays are installed, the collection substation and switchyard facility upgrades would be constructed, as needed, and the electrical collection and communication systems would be installed. Within the solar fields, the electrical and communication wiring would be installed in underground trenches, although some of the mid-voltage collection runs and communication systems may be on overhead lines.

## Construction Water Use

During Project construction, water would be required for common construction-related purposes, including but not limited to dust suppression, soil compaction, and grading. Construction water usage is anticipated to be approximately 240 acre-feet (AF) during the construction period. During construction, the water used is anticipated to be supplied by existing permitted use groundwater sources. A water supply assessment will be prepared.

#### Solid and Nonhazardous Waste

The Project would produce a small amount of solid waste from construction activities. This may include paper, wood, glass, plastics from packing material, waste lumber, insulation, scrap metal and concrete, empty nonhazardous containers, and vegetation waste. These wastes would be segregated, where practical, for recycling. Non-recyclable wastes would be placed in covered dumpsters and removed on a regular basis by a certified waste-handling contractor for disposal at a Class III landfill. Vegetation waste generated by site clearing and grubbing would be chipped/mulched and spread onsite or hauled off site to an appropriate green waste facility.

#### Hazardous Materials

Hazardous materials used during Project construction would be typical of most construction projects of this type. Materials may include small quantities of gasoline, diesel fuel, oils, lubricants, solvents, detergents, degreasers, paints, ethylene glycol, dust palliative, herbicides, and welding materials/supplies. A hazardous materials business plan would be provided to the County Environmental Health Services Division/Hazardous Materials Section that would include a complete list of all materials used on site and information regarding how the materials would be transported and in what form they would be used. This information would be recorded to maintain safety and prevent possible environmental contamination or worker exposure. During Project construction, material safety data sheets for all applicable materials present at the site would be made readily available to on-site personnel.

#### Hazardous Waste

Small quantities of hazardous waste may be generated during Project construction. These wastes may include waste paint, spent construction solvents, waste cleaners, waste oil, oily rags, waste batteries, and spent welding materials. Workers would be trained to properly identify and handle all hazardous materials. Hazardous waste would be either recycled or disposed of, as allowed by permitting, at a permitted and licensed treatment and/or disposal facility.

## Operations

## **Operations and Maintenance Activities**

Typical O&M activities during Project operations include, but are not limited to, facility monitoring; administration and reporting; remote operations of inverters, BESS system and other equipment; site security and management; communication protocol; repair and maintenance of solar facilities, substation, electrical transmission lines, and other Project facilities; and periodic panel washing.

#### **Operations Water Use**

During Project O&M, it is anticipated that water would be required for solar panel washing, equipment washing, non-sanitary uses, and other miscellaneous water uses. Solar panel washing is expected to occur one to four times per year. Although the Applicant only expects to wash the PV panels once per year, the panels may need to be washed more frequently based on site conditions. Therefore, water consumption for the explicit use of washing panels is expected to be approximately 4.5 AF of water per year. This amount is in addition to the water necessary for operations staff, fire suppression and site maintenance, which is a small amount

of water (i.e., approximately 0.45 AF). Water washing is by deluge and no chemicals or other materials are used.

# Decommissioning

At the end of the Project's operational term, the Applicant may determine that the Project should be decommissioned and deconstructed, or it may seek an extension of its conditional use permit. The Applicant will work with the County to ensure decommissioning of the Project after its productive lifetime complies with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements BMPs. The Project would include BMPs to ensure the collection and recycling of modules and to avoid the potential for modules to be disposed of as municipal waste.

Equipment would be de-energized prior to removal, salvaged (where possible), placed in appropriate shipping containers, and secured in a truck transport trailer for shipment off site to be recycled or disposed of at an appropriately licensed disposal facility. Site infrastructure would be removed, including fences and concrete pads that may support the inverters, transformers, and related equipment. The exterior fencing and gates would be removed, and materials would be recycled to the extent feasible. Project roads would be restored to their pre-construction condition to the extent feasible unless the landowner elects to retain the improved roads for access throughout the property. A collection and recycling program would be utilized to promote recycling of Project components and minimize disposal in landfills.

# EIR SCOPE

As set forth in the California Public Resources Code Section et seq., and the CEQA Guidelines, codified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq, the County has determined, based on substantial evidence and in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment and that an Environmental Impact Report shall be prepared for the project. (PRC Sections 21080(d) and (e); 21802.2(d); 21083(b); and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(d) and 15081)

The lead agency has initially identified the following environmental considerations as potentially significant effects of the project:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy Conservation and Climate
   Change
- Geology and Soils

- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Noise
- Public Services and Recreation
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems

The EIR will assess the effects of the project on the environment, identify potentially significant impacts, identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potentially significant environmental impacts, and discuss potentially feasible alternatives to the project that may accomplish basic project objectives while lessening or eliminating any potentially significant project impacts.

## **RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES**

A responsible agency means a public agency other than the lead agency, which has permitting authority or approval power over some aspect of the overall project. This Notice provides a description of the project and solicits comments from responsible agencies, trustee agencies, federal, state and local agencies, and other interested parties on the scope and content of the environmental document to be prepared to analyze the environmental impacts of the project. Comments received in response to this Notice will be reviewed and considered by the lead agency in determining the scope of the EIR. Due to time limits, as defined by CEQA, your response should be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than thirty (30) days after publication of this notice. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to you or to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the project. Your agency may need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the project.

# **OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT**

The NOP is available for public review on the County's website at:

http://cms.sbcounty.gov/lus/Planning/Environmental/Desert.aspx

Additionally, a copy of the NOP is available for public review at the following locations:

San Bernardino County High Desert Government Center 15900 Smoke Tree Street, Suite 1331 Hesperia, CA 92345 San Bernardino County Library Barstow Branch 304 E. Buena Vista Street Barstow, CA 92311

San Bernardino County Government Center 385 North Arrowhead Avenue, Second Floor San Bernardino, CA 92415

We would like to hear what you think. Comments and/or questions should be directed to Anthony DeLuca, Senior Planner, via U.S. mail or email **by no later than 5:00 p.m. on August 5, 2021**.

County of San Bernardino, Land Use Services Department Attn.: Anthony DeLuca, Senior Planner 385 North Arrowhead Avenue, First Floor San Bernardino, CA 92415 Email: <u>Anthony.DeLuca@lus.sbcounty.gov</u>

Please include the name, phone number, and address of your agency's contact person in your response.

# PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

The CEQA process encourages comments and questions from the public throughout the planning process. Consistent with Section 21083.9 of the CEQA statute, a Public Scoping Meeting will be held to solicit public comments on the scope and content of the EIR. A virtual scoping meeting will be held for this project. The date and meeting details are as follows:

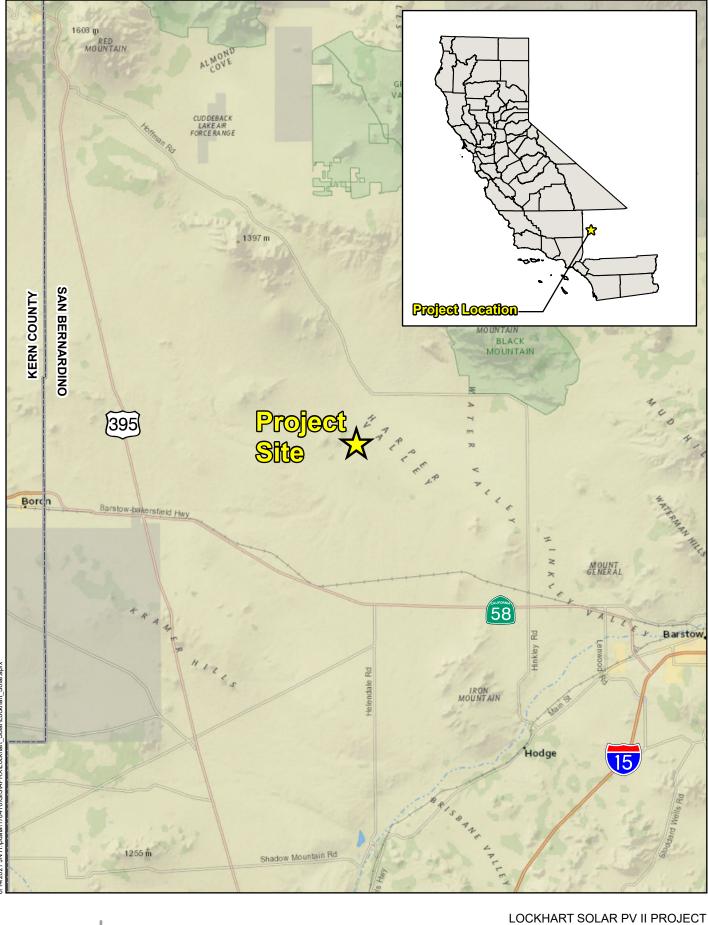
**Date and Time:** July 14, 2021 from 5:00 p.m. to 7:00 pm (Pacific Standard Time)

 Place:
 Via Zoom:

 [https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\_08xeq\_pQRbCP0CmJCBcoKw]

The zoom meeting may also be accessed through the zoom website by using the following **Webinar ID: 967 5945 5508** 

If you require additional information please contact Anthony DeLuca, Senior Planner, at (909) 601-4662.



6/14/2021 JN H:\pdata\178416\GIS\APRX\Lockhart\_Solar\Lockhart\_Solaraprx

Michael Baker INTERNATIONAL



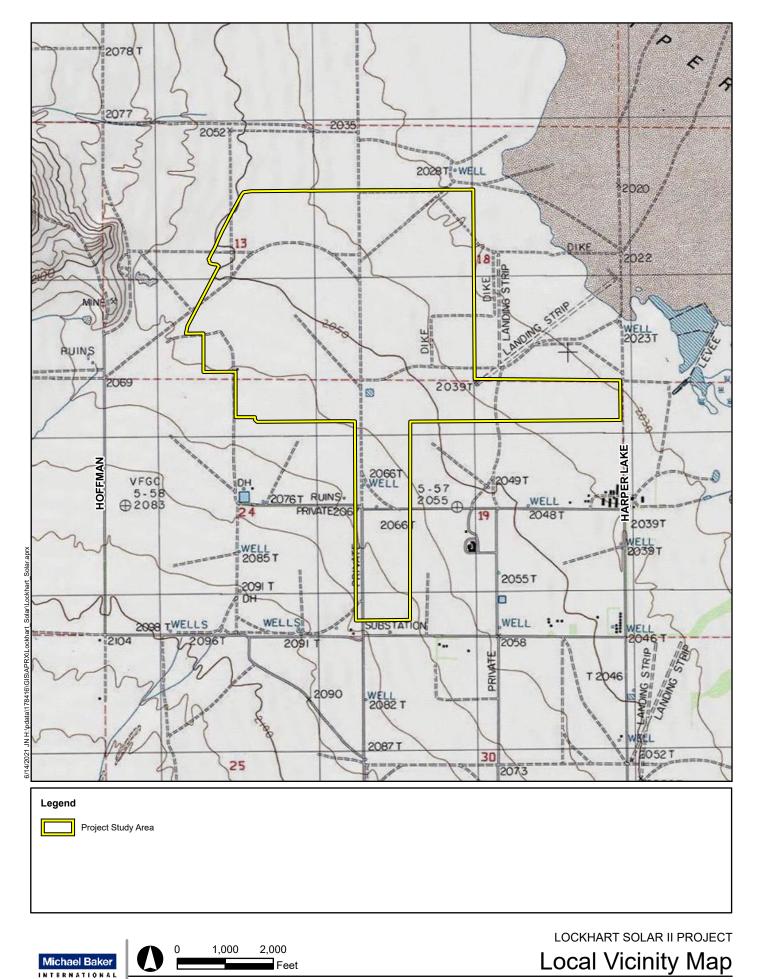
0

5

Miles

**Regional Vicinity** 

Figure 1



Source: ArcGIS Online, 2018, USGS 7.5-Minute topographic quadrangle maps: Lockhart, California (2018)

