

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

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of Draft Environmental Impact Report No. 7869 for the Sonrisa Solar Project

Date: November 2, 2020

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 Permit for the Sonrisa Solar Project (EIR #7869).

Project Title: Sonrisa Solar Project, Unclassified Conditional Use Permit Application No. 3677

Project Applicant: EDPR CA Solar Park VI LLC

Project Summary:

EDPR CA Solar Park VI LLC (Applicant) has submitted to the County an Unclassified Conditional Use Permit (CUP) application to construct, operate, maintain, and ultimately decommission an approximately 200-megawatt alternating current (MWac) photovoltaic (PV) energy generation facility with battery storage capacity of up to 100 MW and battery storage duration of up to 8 hours, an approximately 3.5-mile long 230 kV transmission line, and related facilities and infrastructure, collectively to be known as the Sonrisa Solar Project (Project). The Project would deliver solar-generated power to the grid via PG&E's existing Tranquillity Switching Station.

The approximately 1,700-acre Project site is on Westlands Water District-owned lands in western Fresno County. It is bounded generally by State Route 33 (SR 33, also known as South Derrick Avenue) to the west, West Manning Avenue to the south, South Merced Avenue to the east, and West Adams Avenue to the north. West South Avenue bisects the Project site from east to west. The existing Adams East Solar Project located south of West South Avenue and east of SR 33 is not a part of the Project, and is not included within the Project site. Site access may be provided via SR 33, West Manning Avenue, and/or West Adams Avenue. The nearest communities to the Project site include Tranquillity, Mendota, and San Joaquin. A more detailed description of the project 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: www.co.fresno.ca.us/EIR

Please note that the 2220 Tulare Street office is currently closed to the public and arrangements must be made with Jeremy Shaw (contact information below) to review documents at this address.

Written Comments:

It is anticipated that Project implementation could require authorization from other agencies, potentially including, but not limited to, a California Department of Transportation right-of-way encroachment permit and permit for transportation of oversized loads, California Public Utilities Commission Section 851 permit or notice of construction, San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District Authority to Construct/Permit to operate, and various approvals from Fresno County including the requested CUP.

As required by Section 15082 of the 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. This NOP also solicits input from interested parties other than potential Responsible and Trustee Agencies, including other agencies and affected members of the public.

The County requests that any potential Responsible or Trustee Agencies responding to this NOP reply in a manner consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b), 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., Wednesday, December 2, 2020. Written input should be addressed as noted below.

Please send your written scoping input to:

Attn: Jeremy Shaw
Fresno County Department of Public Works and Planning
Development Services and Capital Projects Division
2220 Tulare Street, Sixth Floor
Fresno, CA 93721
Phone: (559) 600-4207 Fax: (559) 600-4200
Email: jshaw@FresnoCountyCA.gov

Please reference EIR #7869, Sonrisa Solar Project. Please include your name, address, and phone number and/or email address so that we may contact you for clarification, if necessary. Scoping input may also be submitted online at www.co.fresno.ca.us/EIR.

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. Oral and/or written comments also may be presented at the Public Scoping Meeting. The Public Scoping Meeting will be held online on:

Date: Tuesday, November 17, 2020
Time: 6 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Link: <http://bit.ly/Sonrisascopingmeeting> or call-in: 877 853 5247 (Toll Free),
Webinar ID: 886 7912 6870

Signature: 

Date: 10-28-20

Project Location:

The approximately 1,700-acre Project site is located on Westlands Water District-owned lands in unincorporated western Fresno County. It is comprised of the following legal parcels (APNs): 028-071-15ST, 028-071-36ST, 028-071-02ST, 028-071-33ST, 028-071-35ST, 028-071-55ST, 028-071-20ST, 028-071-07ST, 028-071-17ST, 028-071-16ST, 028-071-21ST, 028-071-06ST, 028-071- 01ST, 028-071-04ST, 028-071-13ST. The Project site is bounded generally by State Route 33 (SR 33, also known as South Derrick Avenue) to the west, West Manning Avenue to the south, South Merced Avenue to the east, and West Adams Avenue to the north. West South Avenue bisects the site from east to west. The existing Adams East Solar Project located south of West South Avenue and east of SR 33 is not a part of the Project, and is not included within the Project site. The nearest communities to the Project site include Tranquillity, Mendota, and San Joaquin. See Figure 1, *Project Location*.

Physical Setting:

The Project site consists of disturbed agricultural land that has been either fallow or dry-framed for grains for the past 10 years. The Project footprint is classified as Farmland of Local Importance as designated by the State Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP). The site is not subject to a Williamson Act contract, and soil conditions have a Land Capability Class (LCC) rating signifying that on-site soils have severe limitations that make them unsuitable for cultivation and that restrict their use mainly to grazing, forestland, or wildlife habitat.

Existing agricultural uses, including non-irrigated fields owned mostly by the Westlands Water District, generally surround the Project site. Multiple solar energy facilities also are operating or under development in the immediate surrounding area, including the existing Tranquillity and Adams East solar projects and the proposed Scarlet and Luna Valley solar projects. Interstate 5, the California Aqueduct, the San Joaquin Airport, and Tranquillity, Mendota, and San Joaquin also are located nearby.

Land Use Designation:

The approximately 1,700-acre 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; however, said use is being processed under the more intensive Unclassified Conditional Use Permit application required for 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.

Major Components of the Project:

The Project consists of three major components: The solar energy generation facility, battery storage facility, and the generation tie (gen-tie) line to interconnect the Project to the grid at the existing Tranquillity Switching Station. The solar facility would consist of solar PV modules (or panels) and support structures, and electrical inverters and transformers. Related facilities and infrastructure would include, but not be limited to, an on-site substation. The battery storage system would consist of lithium ion batteries would be arranged in racks, housed in battery enclosures, and have capacity to store energy for up to 8 hours. The proposed gen-tie line would be an approximately 3.5-mile long, 230 kV line connecting the Project substation to the Tranquillity Switching Station.

Alternatives to be Analyzed in the EIR:

In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the Draft EIR 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 one or more 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 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 all environmental issues identified in the Environmental Checklist provided in CEQA Guidelines Appendix G (which issues are 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;
- 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 during construction, 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.