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GAVIN NEWSOM, Governor
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Governor's Office of Planning & Research

February 23, 2021

February 22, 2021

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
2700 "M" Street Suite 100
Bakersfield CA, 93301

**Subject: Bellefield Solar Project by 50LW 8ME LLC (Project)
Notice of Preparation (NOP)
SCH No.: 2021010168**

Dear Ms. Candia:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) received an NOP from the Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department for the above-referenced Project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and CEQA Guidelines.¹

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments and recommendations regarding those activities involved in the Project that may affect California fish and wildlife. Likewise, CDFW appreciates the opportunity to provide comments regarding those aspects of the Project that CDFW, by law, may be required to carry out or approve through the exercise of its own regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code.

While the comment period may have ended, CDFW would appreciate if you will still consider our comments.

CDFW ROLE

CDFW is California's **Trustee Agency** for fish and wildlife resources and holds those resources in trust by statute for all the people of the State (Fish & G. Code, §§ 711.7, subd. (a) & 1802; Pub. Resources Code, § 21070; CEQA Guidelines § 15386, subd. (a)). CDFW, in its trustee capacity, has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (*Id.*, § 1802). Similarly, for purposes of CEQA, CDFW is charged by law to provide, as available, biological expertise during public agency environmental review efforts, focusing specifically on

¹ CEQA is codified in the California Public Resources Code in section 21000 et seq. The "CEQA Guidelines" are found in Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, commencing with section 15000.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 2

projects and related activities that have the potential to adversely affect fish and wildlife resources.

CDFW is also submitting comments as a **Responsible Agency** under CEQA (Pub. Resources Code, § 21069; CEQA Guidelines, § 15381). CDFW expects that it may need to exercise regulatory authority as provided by the Fish and Game Code. As proposed, for example, the Project may be subject to CDFW's lake and streambed alteration regulatory authority (Fish & G. Code, § 1600 et seq.). Likewise, to the extent implementation of the Project as proposed may result in "take" as defined by State law of any species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) (Fish & G. Code, § 2050 et seq.), related authorization as provided by the Fish and Game Code may be required.

Fully Protected Species: CDFW has jurisdiction over fully protected species of birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, and fish, pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515. CDFW prohibits and cannot authorize take of any fully protected species.

Nesting Birds: CDFW has jurisdiction over actions with potential to result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Fish and Game Code sections that protect birds, their eggs and nests include, sections 3503 (regarding unlawful take, possession or needless destruction of the nest or eggs of any bird), 3503.5 (regarding the take, possession or destruction of any birds-of-prey or their nests or eggs), and 3513 (regarding unlawful take of any migratory nongame bird).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION SUMMARY

Proponent: 50LW 8ME LLC

Objective: The Bellefield Solar Project by 50LW 8ME LLC (project proponent), is a proposed photovoltaic solar facility and energy storage system capable of producing up to 1,500-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) utility-scale solar power with an up to 1,500 MW-hour (MWh) energy storage capacity on approximately 8,371 acres of privately-owned land. The proposed project would be supported by a 230 kilovolt (kV) overhead and/or underground electrical transmission line(s) originating from one or more on-site substation(s)/switchyard(s) and terminating at the Southern California Edison (SCE) Windhub Substation. The combined linear distance of the gen-tie alternatives are 89.6 miles with a width of 200 feet. The collector lines are generally located within or adjacent to the Kern County and/or California City parcels, while the gen-tie alternatives generally originate from the central portion of the Project heading west around Mojave, before reaching Oak Creek Road and SCE's Windhub Substation. The project may require the acquisition of up to 200 feet of privately owned land, abutting the Oak Creek Road right-of-way for gen-tie routing purposes. The proposed

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 3

project's permanent facilities would include service roads, a power collection system, communication cables, overhead and underground transmission lines, electrical switchyards, project substations, energy storage system(s), and operations and maintenance (O&M) facilities.

Location: The Project site is approximately 8,371 acres of land within portions of unincorporated Kern county and the City of California City. It is East of the Mojave Airport, West of the Hyundai Proving Ground, and straddles the State Road 58.

COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CDFW offers the following comments and recommendations to assist the city of Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department in adequately identifying and/or mitigating the Project's significant, or potentially significant, direct and indirect impacts on fish and wildlife (biological) resources. Editorial comments or other suggestions may also be included to improve the CEQA document prepared for this Project.

There are special-status species that have been documented in the Project vicinity and may be present at individual Project sites in the Project area. These resources may need to be evaluated and addressed prior to any approvals that would allow ground-disturbing activities or land use changes.

CDFW is concerned regarding potential impacts to special-status species including, but not limited to, the State and Federally threatened desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*); the State threatened Mojave ground squirrel (*Sturna antillarum browni*), and Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsonii*), the State candidate for listing as threatened western Joshua tree (*Yucca brevifolia*), and the State species of special concern American badger (*Taxidea taxus*), northern legless lizard (*Anniella pulchra*), special status townsend's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus townsendii*), LeConte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*), burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia*), Tehachapi pocket mouse (*Perognathus alticola inexpectatus*) and loggerhead shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*); as well as the desert kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis ssp. macrotis*), which is protected under California Code of Regulations (CCR), Title 14, Chapter 5, Section 460.

We recommend that the County require the Project proponent to conduct species-specific surveys according to acceptable protocols. The results of these surveys will help inform the County's EIR analysis of potential Project-related impacts to these species, as well as any additional species that also depend on desert scrub and western Joshua tree woodland habitats found on the Project site. The Department also recommends the County include a cumulative impacts analysis to determine how this Project along with recently approved or reasonably foreseeable projects in the vicinity with similar impacts will affect biological resources and impair connectivity. Our specific recommendations follow.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 4

I. Environmental Setting and Related Impact

Would the Project have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special-status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by CDFW or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)?

COMMENT 1: Desert Tortoise

Issue: The Project site is within the range of desert tortoise and based on aerial imagery, appears to contain suitable habitat. Desert tortoise are most common in desert scrub, desert wash, and Joshua tree habitats (CDFW, 2018).

Specific impact: Potentially significant impacts that may result from Project-related activities include loss of foraging habitat, habitat degradation and fragmentation, burrow destruction, and direct mortality.

Evidence impact is potentially significant: Human impacts to desert tortoise include habitat conversion to agriculture and urban lands, degradation of habitat by off-highway vehicles (OHV), intentional killing of tortoises, and killing by cars and OHV (Doak, Kareiva, Kleptka, 1994). Habitat conversion to agriculture results in the loss of habitat and may lead to an increase in the predator raven population, drawdown of water table, introduction of pesticides and other toxic chemicals, and the potential introduction of invasive plants (Boarman, 2002). Project activities may result in the loss of potential desert tortoise habitat through conversion and may increase habitat fragmentation.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

To evaluate potential Project-related impacts to desert tortoise, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project site and including the following measures in the EIR.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 1: Desert Tortoise Surveys

CDFW advises surveys for desert tortoise be conducted by a qualified wildlife biologist who understands and will follow the pre-project survey protocol as outlined in "Preparing for any action that may occur within the range of the Mojave Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*)" (USFWS, 2010) and has previous experience surveying for desert tortoise. The surveys must be conducted during the appropriate survey periods for the entire Project site, including the gen-tie line corridor and collection line between the two Project sites to determine the potential for desert tortoise use of the Project site and surrounding area. CDFW further recommends that survey results be submitted to both the Department and USFWS.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 5

Recommended Mitigation Measure 2: Desert Tortoise Take Authorization

If desert tortoise is found within the Project area during surveys or construction activities, consultation with CDFW is advised to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take; or if avoidance is not feasible, to acquire an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) prior to any vegetation- or ground-disturbing activities. Any take of desert tortoise without take authorization would be a violation of Fish and Game Code section 2080.

COMMENT 2: Mohave Ground Squirrel (MGS)

Issue: The Project site is within the range of MGS and based on aerial imagery, the Project site appears to contain suitable habitat for MGS.

Specific impact: Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measure for MGS, potential significant impacts associated with the Project's construction include burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment, reduced reproductive success, and mortality of individuals.

Evidence impact is potentially significant: Major threats to MGS are drought, habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation, and habitat degradation (Gustafson, 1993). MGS is restricted to a small geographic range and the greatest habitat loss has occurred near desert towns including California City (Gustafson, 1993). Natural cycling is anticipated in MGS populations therefore the true indicators of the status of the species are the quantity, pattern of distribution, and quality of habitat (Gustafson, 1993). Project activities may result in the loss of potential MGS habitat through conversion and may increase habitat fragmentation.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

To evaluate potential Project-related impacts to MGS, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project site and including the following measures in the EIR.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 3: MGS Surveys

CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist, with appropriate permits, conduct protocol surveys for MGS following the methods described in the "Mohave Ground Squirrel Survey Guidelines" (CDFG, 2003) during the appropriate survey season and that these surveys be conducted in areas of potential habitat, including marginal habitat covering the entire Project site, including the gen-tie line and collection line corridors. Because of the large size of the Project site, the Department recommends the Project applicant propose a surveying methodology that includes use of remote camera stations. CDFW recommends submittal of the proposed survey methodology to CDFW for review and

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 6

approval prior to implementation, to avoid expenditure of funds on an inadequate survey effort. We also recommend that the results of these surveys be submitted to the Department for evaluation. Please note MGS surveys are valid for one year and should be conducted within a year of the start of ground-disturbing activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 4: MGS Avoidance

In order to implement full avoidance for MGS, CDFW recommends a 50-foot no disturbance buffer be employed around all burrows that could be used by MGS. Alternately, the Project proponent may choose to assume presence of MGS and obtain an ITP prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities.

Mitigation Measure 5: MGS Take Authorization

If MGS are found within the Project area during preconstruction surveys or construction activities, consultation with CDFW is recommended to discuss how to implement the Project and avoid take; or if avoidance is not feasible, to acquire an ITP pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) prior to any ground-disturbing activities. Any take of MGS without take authorization would be a violation of Fish and Game Code section 2080.

COMMENT 3: Swainson's Hawk (SWHA)

Issue: SWHA have the potential to forage within and near the Project site. Aerial imagery shows the presence of suitable foraging habitat for the species.

Specific impacts: Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for SWHA, potential significant impacts that may result from Project activities include loss of foraging habitat that would reduce nesting success (loss or reduced health or vigor of eggs or young), and direct mortality. Any take of SWHA without appropriate incidental take authorization would be a violation of Fish and Game Code.

Evidence impact is potentially significant: SWHA exhibit high nest-site fidelity year after year and lack of suitable nesting habitat in the San Joaquin Valley limits their local distribution and abundance (CDFW 2016). The Project as proposed will involve noise, groundwork, and movement of workers that could affect nests and has the potential to result in nest abandonment, significantly impacting local nesting SWHA.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

Because suitable habitat for SWHA is present throughout the Project site, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project site and including the following measures in the EIR.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 7

Recommended Mitigation Measure 6: SWHA Surveys

To evaluate potential impacts, CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist conduct surveys as described in the Swainson's Hawk Survey Protocols, Impact Avoidance, and Minimization Measures for Renewable Energy Projects in the Antelope Valley of Los Angeles and Kern Counties, California (2010) prior to project implementation. The survey protocol includes early season surveys to assist the project proponent in implementing necessary avoidance and minimization measures, and in identifying active nest sites prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 7: No-disturbance Buffer

If ground disturbing activities are to take place during the normal bird breeding season (March 1 through September 15), CDFW recommends that additional pre activity surveys for active nests be conducted by a qualified biologist no more than 10 days prior to the start of Project implementation to ensure that no SWHA have begun nesting activities near the Project site. CDFW recommends a minimum no disturbance buffer of 0.5-mile be delineated around active nests until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 8: SWHA Foraging Habitat

CDFW recommends compensation for the loss of SWHA foraging habitat to reduce impacts to SWHA foraging habitat to less than significant based on Swainson's Hawk Survey Protocols, Impact Avoidance, and Minimization Measures for Renewable Energy Projects in the Antelope Valley of Los Angeles and Kern Counties, California (2010).

Recommended Mitigation Measure 9: SWHA Take Authorization

CDFW recommends that in the event an active SWHA nest is detected during surveys and the ½-mile no-disturbance buffer around the nest cannot feasibly be implemented, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss how to implement the project and avoid take. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization through the issuance of an ITP, pursuant to Fish and Game Code section 2081 subdivision (b) is necessary to comply with CESA.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 8

COMMENT 4: Burrowing Owl (BUOW)

Issue: BUOW may occur near the Project site (CDFW 2021). BUOW inhabit open grassland or adjacent canal banks, ROWs, vacant lots, etc. containing small mammal burrows, a requisite habitat feature used by BUOW for nesting and cover.

Specific impact: Potentially significant direct impacts associated with subsequent activities include burrow collapse, inadvertent entrapment, nest abandonment, reduced reproductive success, reduction in health and vigor of eggs and/or young, and direct mortality of individuals.

Evidence impact is potentially significant: BUOW rely on burrow habitat year-round for their survival and reproduction. Habitat loss and degradation are considered the greatest threats to BUOW in California's Central Valley (Gervais et al. 2008). Therefore, subsequent ground-disturbing activities associated with the Project have the potential to significantly impact local BUOW populations. In addition, and as described in CDFW's "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation" (CDFG 2012), excluding and/or evicting BUOW from their burrows is considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s) (Regarding Environmental Setting and Related Impact)

To evaluate potential impacts to BUOW, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project site, incorporating the following mitigation measures into the EIR prepared for this Project, and that these measures be made conditions of approval for the Project.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 10: BUOW Surveys

CDFW recommends assessing presence/absence of BUOW by having a qualified biologist conduct surveys following the California Burrowing Owl Consortium's "Burrowing Owl Survey Protocol and Mitigation Guidelines" (CBOC 1993) and CDFW's Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation" (CDFG 2012). Specifically, CBOC and CDFW's Staff Report suggest three or more surveillance surveys conducted during daylight with each visit occurring at least three weeks apart during the peak breeding season (April 15 to July 15), when BUOW are most detectable. These surveys are to determine if there are more BUOW in addition to the December 2017 observation surveyed for the Project.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 11: BUOW Avoidance

CDFW recommends no-disturbance buffers, as outlined in the "Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation" (CDFG 2012), be implemented prior to and during any

Ronelle Candia
 Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
 February 22, 2021
 Page 9

ground-disturbing activities. Specifically, CDFW's Staff Report recommends that impacts to occupied burrows be avoided in accordance with the following table unless a qualified biologist approved by CDFW verifies through non-invasive methods that either: 1) the birds have not begun egg laying and incubation; or 2) that juveniles from the occupied burrows are foraging independently and are capable of independent survival.

Location	Time of Year	Level of Disturbance		
		Low	Med	High
Nesting sites	April 1-Aug 15	200 m*	500 m	500 m
Nesting sites	Aug 16-Oct 15	200 m	200 m	500 m
Nesting sites	Oct 16-Mar 31	50 m	100 m	500 m

* meters (m)

Recommended Mitigation Measure 12: BUOW Passive Relocation and Mitigation

If BUOW are found within these recommended buffers and avoidance is not possible, it is important to note that according to the Staff Report (CDFG 2012), exclusion is not a take avoidance, minimization, or mitigation method and is considered a potentially significant impact under CEQA. However, if necessary, CDFW recommends that burrow exclusion be conducted by qualified biologists and only during the non-breeding season, before breeding behavior is exhibited and after the burrow is confirmed empty through non-invasive methods, such as surveillance. CDFW recommends replacement of occupied burrows with artificial burrows at a ratio of 1 burrow collapsed to 1 artificial burrow constructed (1:1) as mitigation for the potentially significant impact of evicting BUOW. BUOW may attempt to colonize or re-colonize an area that will be impacted; thus, CDFW recommends ongoing surveillance, at a rate that is sufficient to detect BUOW if they return.

COMMENT 5: Special-Status Plant species

Issue: Plants listed pursuant to federal Endangered Species Act (FESA), CESA, and the Native Plant Protection Act, as well as other special-status plants such California Rare Plant Rank (CRPR) plant species have the potential to occur in and around the Project area (CDFW 2021). Based upon available aerial photography, western Joshua tree appears to occur within the Project site.

Specific impact: Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures potential impacts to special-status plant species include inability to reproduce and direct mortality. Unauthorized take of species listed as threatened, endangered, or

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 10

rare pursuant to CESA or the Native Plant Protection Act is a violation of Fish and Game Code.

Evidence impact would be significant: Special-status plant species plant species are threatened with habitat loss and habitat fragmentation resulting from development, vehicle and foot traffic, and introduction of non-native plant species (CNPS 2020), all of which may be unintended impacts of the Project. Therefore, impacts of the Project have the potential to significantly impact populations of the species mentioned above.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

To evaluate potential impacts to special-status plants associated with the Project, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project area and including the following mitigation measures as conditions of Project approval in the Project's EIR.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 13: Special-Status Plant Habitat Assessment

CDFW recommends that a qualified botanist conduct a habitat assessment of individual Project sites well in advance of Project implementation, to determine if the Project area or its vicinity contains suitable habitat for special-status plant species.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 14: Focused Surveys

If suitable habitat is present, CDFW recommends that individual Project sites be surveyed for special-status plants by a qualified botanist following the "Protocols for Surveying and Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities" (CDFW 2018). This protocol, which is intended to maximize detectability, includes identification of reference populations to facilitate the likelihood of field investigations occurring during the appropriate floristic period. In the absence of protocol-level surveys being performed, additional surveys may be necessary.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 15: Special-Status Plant Avoidance

CDFW recommends special-status plant species be avoided whenever possible by delineation and observing a no-disturbance buffer of at least 250 feet from the outer edge of the plant population(s) or specific habitat type(s) required by special-status plant species. If buffers cannot be maintained, then consultation with CDFW is warranted to determine appropriate minimization and mitigation measures for impacts to special-status plant species.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 11

Recommended Mitigation Measure 16: Special-Status Plant Take Authorization

As stated above, Joshua tree appears to occur on the Project site based upon available aerial photography. Therefore, consultation with CDFW is warranted to discuss take authorization. If another State-listed plant species is identified during botanical surveys, consultation with CDFW is warranted to determine if the Project can avoid take of that species. If take cannot be avoided, take authorization would need to occur through acquisition of an ITP from CDFW to comply with CESA and/or Fish and Game Code section 1900, and California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 786.9, subdivision (b).

COMMENT 6: Other Species of Special Concern

Issue: American badger, LeConte's thrasher, loggerhead shrike, northern legless lizard, Tehachapi pocket mouse, Townsend's big-eared bat have the potential to occur in the project vicinity. These species have been documented near the area and suitable habitat exists within the project area (CNDDDB 2021).

Specific impact: Without appropriate avoidance and minimization measures for these special status species potentially significant impacts associated with the Project's activities could include site abandonment which may result in reduced health or vigor of eggs and/or young, and/or direct mortality.

Evidence impact is potentially significant: The Project area has the capacity to support the species and thus, subsequent ground-disturbing activities involved with the Project have the potential to impact the species.

Recommended Potentially Feasible Mitigation Measure(s)

To evaluate potential impacts to these special status species, CDFW recommends conducting the following evaluation of the Project site, incorporating the following mitigation measures into the EIR prepared for this Project, and that these measures be made conditions of approval for the Project.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 17: Species Specific Surveys

If suitable habitat is present, CDFW recommends that a qualified biologist conduct focused surveys for each of these species and their requisite habitat features using the appropriate survey protocol to evaluate potential impacts resulting from Project-related activities.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 12

Recommended Mitigation Measure 18: Special-Status Species Avoidance

Avoidance whenever possible is encouraged via delineation however, a qualified biologist with the appropriate handling permit may relocate special status species out of the project area into a nearby area with suitable habitat.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 19: American Badger Avoidance

If suitable badger dens are present, avoidance whenever possible is encouraged via delineation and observation of a 50-foot no-disturbance buffer around dens until it is determined through non-invasive means that individuals occupying the den have dispersed.

Recommended Mitigation Measure 20: Bat Eviction Plan

Detection of special-status bat species warrants consultation with CDFW prior to any activity that may disturb bats. CDFW recommends submitting a Bat Eviction Plan to CDFW for written approval prior to project implementation, and that the Eviction Plan include details for excluding bats from the roost site, and a monitoring plan to ensure that all bats have exited the roost prior to the start of activity and will be unable to re-enter the roost until activity is completed. CDFW also recommends that Project or bat eviction activities be timed to avoid lactation and young-rearing.

II. Editorial Comments and/or Suggestions

Desert Kit Fox: Desert kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis arsipus*) is protected under the California Code of Regulations, Chapter 5, Section 460, which prohibits “take” of the species for any reason. CDFW recommends that the draft EIR include measures to help ensure the Project complies with this regulation and to avoid the take of desert kit fox. CDFW recommends the County require a qualified biologist conduct surveys following the methodology in the *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Standardized Recommendations for Protection of the Endangered San Joaquin Kit Fox Prior to or During Ground Disturbance*, which can be found at http://www.fws.gov/sacramento/es/Survey-Protocols-Guidelines/Documents/kitfox_standard_rec_2011.pdf. While this survey methodology was developed specifically for the San Joaquin kit fox subspecies, it has been found to be effective in detecting dens of the desert fox subspecies as well. If any active or potential dens are found on the Project site, consultation with CDFW is warranted for guidance on take avoidance measures for the desert kit fox. CDFW also recommends all perimeter fencing be raised five to seven inches above ground level and knuckled under to allow desert kit fox movement into and out of the Project site.

Federally Listed Species: CDFW recommends consulting with the USFWS on potential impacts to federally listed species including, but not limited to, desert tortoise.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 13

Take under FESA is more broadly defined than CESA; take under FESA also includes significant habitat modification or degradation that could result in death or injury to a listed species by interfering with essential behavioral patterns such as breeding, foraging, or nesting. Consultation with the USFWS in order to comply with FESA is advised well in advance of any ground-disturbing activities.

Lake and Streambed Alteration: The Project contains features that may result in Project activities at individual Project sites being subject to CDFW's regulatory authority pursuant Fish and Game Code section 1600 et seq. Fish and Game Code section 1602 requires an entity to notify CDFW prior to commencing any activity that may (a) substantially divert or obstruct the natural flow of any river, stream, or lake; (b) substantially change or use any material from the bed, bank, or channel of any river, stream, or lake; or (c) deposit debris, waste or other materials that could pass into any river, stream, or lake. "Any river, stream, or lake" includes those that are ephemeral or intermittent, such as the unnamed stream within the Project site, as well as those that are perennial in nature.

For additional information on notification requirements, please contact our staff in the Lake and Streambed Alteration Program at (559) 243-4593. It is important to note, CDFW is required to comply with CEQA, as a Responsible Agency, when issuing a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA). If inadequate, or no environmental review, has occurred, for the Project activities that are subject to notification under Fish and Game Code section 1602, CDFW will not be able to issue the Final LSAA until CEQA analysis for the project is complete. This may lead to considerable Project delays.

Nesting birds: CDFW encourages Project implementation at individual Project sites occur during the bird non-nesting season if suitable nesting bird habitat is present. However, if ground-disturbing activities must occur during the breeding season (February through mid-September), the Project's applicant is responsible for ensuring that implementation of the Project does not result in violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act or relevant Fish and Game Codes as referenced above.

To evaluate Project-related impacts on nesting birds if suitable habitat is present, CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist conduct pre-activity surveys for active nests no more than 10 days prior to the start of ground disturbance to maximize the probability that nests that could potentially be impacted are detected. CDFW also recommends that surveys cover a sufficient area around the work site to identify nests and determine their status. A sufficient area means any area potentially affected by the Project. In addition to direct impacts (i.e. nest destruction), noise, vibration, and movement of workers or equipment could also affect nests. Prior to initiation of construction activities, CDFW recommends a qualified biologist conduct a survey to establish a behavioral baseline of all identified nests. Once construction begins, CDFW

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 14

recommends a qualified biologist continuously monitor nests to detect behavioral changes resulting from the Project. If behavioral changes occur, CDFW recommends the work causing that change cease and CDFW consulted for additional avoidance and minimization measures.

If continuous monitoring of identified nests by a qualified wildlife biologist is not feasible, CDFW recommends a minimum no-disturbance buffer of 250 feet around active nests of non-listed bird species and a 500-foot no-disturbance buffer around active nests of non-listed raptors. These buffers are advised to remain in place until the breeding season has ended or until a qualified biologist has determined that the birds have fledged and are no longer reliant upon the nest or parental care for survival. Variance from these no disturbance buffers is possible when there is compelling biological or ecological reason to do so, such as when the construction area would be concealed from a nest site by topography. CDFW recommends that a qualified wildlife biologist advise and support any variance from these buffers and notify CDFW in advance of implementing a variance.

ENVIRONMENTAL DATA

CEQA requires that information developed in environmental impact reports and negative declarations be incorporated into a database which may be used to make subsequent or supplemental environmental determinations (Pub. Resources Code, § 21003, subd. (e)). Accordingly, please report any special-status species and natural communities detected during Project surveys to the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB). The CNDDDB field survey form can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Submitting-Data>. The completed form can be mailed electronically to CNDDDB at the following email address: CNDDDB@wildlife.ca.gov. The types of information reported to CNDDDB can be found at the following link: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Data/CNDDDB/Plants-and-Animals>.

FILING FEES

If it is determined that the Project has the potential to impact biological resources, an assessment of filing fees will be necessary. Fees are payable upon filing of the Notice of Determination by the Lead Agency and serve to help defray the cost of environmental review by CDFW. Payment of the fee is required for the underlying project approval to be operative, vested, and final (Cal. Code Regs, tit. 14, § 753.5; Fish & G. Code, § 711.4; Pub. Resources Code, § 21089).

CDFW appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Project to assist the Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department in identifying and mitigating the Project's impacts on biological resources.

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 15

More information on survey and monitoring protocols for sensitive species can be found at CDFW's website (<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Survey-Protocols>). If you have any questions, please contact Jaime Marquez, Environmental Scientist, at the address provided on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 243-4014, extension 291, or by electronic mail at Jaime.Marquez@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

FA83F09FE08945A...

Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

Attachment

cc: United States Fish and Wildlife Service
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-2605
Sacramento, California 95825

Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 16

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Ronelle Candia
Kern County Planning and Natural Resources Department
February 22, 2021
Page 17

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Attachment 1**MITIGATION MONITORING AND REPORTING PROGRAM (MMRP)
FOR CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES****PROJECT: Bellefield Solar
SCH No.: 2021010168**

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURE	STATUS/DATE/INITIALS
<i>Before Disturbing Soil or Vegetation</i>	
Mitigation Measure 1: Desert Tortoise Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 2: Desert Tortoise Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 3: MGS Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 5: MGS Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 6: SWHA Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 8: SWHA Foraging Habitat	
Mitigation Measure 9: SWHA Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 10: BUOW Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 12: BUOW Passive Relocation	
Mitigation Measure 13: Special-Status Plant Habitat Assessment	
Mitigation Measure 14: Focused Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 16: Special-Status Plant Take Authorization	
Mitigation Measure 17: Species Specific Surveys	
Mitigation Measure 20: Bat Eviction Plan	
<i>During Construction</i>	
Mitigation Measure 4: MGS Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 7: No-Disturbance Buffer	
Mitigation Measure 11: BUOW Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 15: Special-Status Plant Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 18: Special-Status Species Avoidance	
Mitigation Measure 19: American Badger Avoidance	