

## **Notice of Availability of Draft Supplement EIR for Public Review**

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NOTICE is hereby given that a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) has been prepared by the County of Merced, State of California, and is available for public review pursuant to State of California, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for the project listed below:

**PROPOSED PROJECT:** Las Camas Solar Project (Conditional Use Permit No. CUP 20-011; General Plan Amendment No. 20-001; and Zone Change Amendment No. ZC 21-002) (State Clearinghouse No. #2021080196)

**PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT PERIOD:** May 3, 2024 to June 17, 2024

### **PROJECT LOCATION**

The 1,741-acre solar project site is located in western Merced County, approximately 3 miles southeast of the unincorporated community of Santa Nella, California, 6 miles west of the city of Los Banos, and approximately 30 miles southwest of the city of Merced, at the southwest corner of the intersection of State Route (SR) 33/SR 152 and Interstate 5. The proposed 202.8-acre off-site residential redesignation area abuts the southern border of the solar project site boundary. The off-site mitigation site is approximately 5 miles south of the solar project site, immediately south of Los Banos Reservoir. The PG&E substation is located approximately 0.2 mile west of the solar project site.

### **PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

EDPR CA Solar Park III LLC (the project applicant) proposes to develop, own, and operate a 200-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) ground-mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) power plant located on vacant lands in unincorporated Merced County, California. The applicant has filed applications for a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) (CUP Application No. 20-011), Merced County General Plan (General Plan) amendment (General Plan Amendment Application No. 20-001), and zone change (Zone Change Application No. ZC 21-002) with Merced County to allow for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed solar project, which entails the long-term generation of clean renewable energy from solar power. The energy generated by the solar project could be sold to public utilities, municipal utilities, or large private consumers of power. The power generated by the solar project would be interconnected to existing PG&E power grid infrastructure for delivery to the purchaser of the power.

The Las Camas Solar Project (project or proposed project) consists of the proposed Las Camas solar facility (solar project), located on roughly 1,741 acres of undeveloped, privately owned land (solar project site), and improvements to the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) Los Banos Substation (PG&E substation improvements), located approximately 0.2 mile west of the solar project site. The project would also construct a 230-kilovolt generation tie line (gen-tie line) to connect the solar project to the PG&E substation. The areas comprising the solar project site, gen-tie line, and PG&E substation are collectively referred to as the “project site” in this SEIR. The solar project is anticipated to be operational in 2025 and expected to operate for 35 years.

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The proposed project also includes two off-site components: establishment of a roughly 1,498-acre, off-site mitigation site (off-site mitigation site) as part of the solar project's habitat mitigation proposal, and a General Plan amendment to redesignate roughly 202.8 acres immediately south of the solar project site from single-family residential to high-density/medium-density residential (off-site General Plan amendment).

### **PROJECT IMPACTS**

This SEIR incorporates by reference the analysis of the Villages of Laguna San Luis Community Plan (Community Plan) (SCH No. 205511074) prepared by Merced County as part of its planning process, and evaluates the incremental differences between the original project and the proposed project as modified. Changes to the project that were analyzed in the Community Plan EIR (the previous EIR) consist of: (1) changes to the Community Plan, and (2) changes to the proposed land uses and development resulting from the Community Plan (i.e., construction and operation of the proposed solar project, gen-tie line, and PG&E substation improvements).

### **Significant Environmental Impacts**

Under CEQA, a significant effect on the environment is defined as a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project, including land, air, water, minerals, flora, fauna, ambient noise, transportation and traffic, and objects of historic or aesthetic significance. Significant impacts identified in the previous EIR would include potential to degrade existing visual character and public views; increased air pollutants; harm to special-status species and/or loss of their habitat; damage to or destruction of historic, tribal cultural, prehistoric, and paleontological resources; increased soil erosion; land use conflicts; greenhouse gas emissions; violation of water quality standards; construction noise; exceedance of landfill capacity; increased wildfire risk.

The SEIR analysis determined that with implementation of applicable mitigation measures identified in the previous EIR and new project-specific mitigation measures, no new significant impacts or substantially more severe significant impacts would occur compared to the significant impacts identified in the previous EIR, with one exception: exceedance of landfill capacity. Under the proposed project, this impact would remain significant and unavoidable and would be more severe than the significant and unavoidable impact identified in the previous EIR due to the additional solid waste that would be generated during solar project decommissioning (and to a lesser extent, operation between 2054 and 2060).

### **DRAFT SEIR REVIEW**

The Draft SEIR is available for review during normal business hours at the Merced County Main Administration Building and County Clerk's Office in Merced (2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340). The Draft SEIR is also available online at: <https://www.countyofmerced.com/414/Environmental-Documents>

### **COMMENTING ON THE DRAFT SEIR**

Consistent with the requirements of Section 15087 of the State CEQA Guidelines, this Draft SEIR is being made available on May 3, 2024, for public review for a period of 45 days. During this period,

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the general public, agencies, and organizations may submit written comments on the content of this Draft SEIR to Merced County. Comments received on the Draft SEIR will be responded to in the Final SEIR.

**SEND COMMENTS TO:**

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Comments should be provided at the earliest possible date but must be received by 5:00 p.m. on June 17, 2024. Emailed comments should be submitted to [Planning@countyofmerced.com](mailto:Planning@countyofmerced.com) and should include the phrase "Las Camas Solar Draft SEIR" in the subject line.