



March 26, 2024

Jim Minnick
Director, Imperial County
Department of Planning and Development Services
801 Main Street, El Centro, CA
Email: jimminnick@co.imperial.ca.us
Phone: (442) 265-1736

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

Mar 26 2024
STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

Assessor Parcel Number(s): 017-970-011, 017-010-057, 017-340-003
Project Address: 747 Skyview Drive, Salton City, CA 92275
Property Owner: Imperial County
Project Name: Ormat-Truckhaven Geothermal Zone Change and General Plan Amendment Project

Dear Jim Minnick,

The California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) for the Ormat-Truckhaven Geothermal Zone Change and General Plan Amendment Project (Project). CalGEM authority is set forth in Division 3 of the Public Resources Code (PRC), and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations (CCR).

CCR Chapter 2 Article 1 §1681 establishes implementation of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and geothermal exploratory projects, Article 2 and 3 address general responsibilities over geothermal projects, and PRC Chapter 4 §3700-3776 establishes established CalGEM authority over geothermal resources. Local permitting agencies, property owners, and/or developers should be aware of, and fully understand, that significant and potentially dangerous issues may be associated with activities near the development and operation of geothermal wells.

CalGEM has received and reviewed the Project MND dated February 2024. CalGEM assists local permitting agencies, property owners, and developers in making wise land use decisions regarding potential activities near oil, gas, or geothermal wells.

This letter contains some background on the Project from the MND, discussion with the MND preparer (Christina Willis, Willis Environmental Planning), and information from the Imperial County website as well as CalGEM's comments and concerns related to the Project.

Jim Minnick
Imperial Co. Dept. of Planning and Development Services
March 26, 2024
Page 2 of 5

Background

The Ormat-Truckhaven Geothermal Exploration Well Zone Change and General Plan Amendment Project area is located within the "Truckhaven Geothermal Leasing Area" west of the Salton Sea and south-southwest of Salton City in western Imperial County, California. The six (6) exploratory wells included in the Truckhaven Geothermal Exploratory Well Project are located within the USGS Geologic Survey 7.5' quadrangle for Kane Springs NW within the three (3) parcels and are also located within the West Shores/Salton City Urban Area Plan (2000), west of State Route 86 and east of the northwest boundary of the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area (SVRA).

It is CalGEM's understanding that an MND was prepared and certified in December 2019 for this same Project. However, the MND and subsequent permit did not address the need for a rezoning of the area to allow for the implementation of the Project. Therefore, this revised MND was prepared to address all of the actions of the 2019 MND, including a zoning change. Note that surveys addressed in the 2019 MND are not included in this MND as these have already been performed after the 2019 MND was certified and were not subject to limitations based on the zoning of the area.

Specifically in terms of zoning, the geothermal exploratory wells located within the Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 017-970-011 (Well Site #32-5 and Well Site #47-5) require a General Plan Amendment to add this parcel to the Imperial County General Plan's Geothermal Energy Overlay Zone. The geothermal exploratory wells located within APN 017-010-057 (Wells #18-32 and #47-32) would require a Zone Change and General Plan Amendment to change the zone classification from R-1-L.5 to S-1, change the land use designation from Low Density Residential to Recreation/Open Space, and to add parcel APN 017-010-057 to Imperial County General Plan's Geothermal Energy Overlay Zone. Additionally, a General Plan Amendment is needed to add geothermal exploration wells as an allowable use within the Recreation and Open Space designation of the West Shores/Salton City Urban Area Plan (2000).

The well sites have not been installed and are currently vacant, unirrigated, desert land that is sparsely vegetated and primarily flat. Primary highway access to the proposed well sites would be provided off State Route 86 to Airpark Drive or County Dump Road. Existing access roads would be utilized to the extent practical. The access roads would be constructed or improved with gravel and/or maintained as needed to safely accommodate the traffic required for the exploration well drilling activities. Roadbeds would typically be approximately twenty (20) feet in width.

The exploration well program includes ground disturbing activities such as constructing or improving access roads, grading and leveling well pads, digging containment basins, drilling the proposed wells, and re-grading and spreading topsoil following

Jim Minnick
Imperial Co. Dept. of Planning and Development Services
March 26, 2024
Page 3 of 5

abandonment (if necessary). The duration for well pad construction, drilling, testing, and cleanup would be 90 days. Water required for well pad and access road construction and well drilling would typically average about 50,000 gallons per day. Water necessary for these activities would be purchased from the Coachella Valley Water District via a fire hydrant.

Upon the completion of each well drilled and flow-tested, a decision would be made by the Applicant regarding the commercial potential of each well. If a well is judged by the Applicant to have any commercial potential, well operations would likely be suspended pending application for and receipt of regulatory approvals to place the well into commercial service through a new pipeline to a new geothermal power plant or direct use facility. Any future facilities would need to undergo CEQA review as a separate project (exploratory geothermal projects can be considered separate and distinct from a field development project as allowed under CEQA section 21065.5 and 21090.1 for exploratory geothermal projects with up to six wells).

If a well is judged to not have commercial potential, it may continue to be monitored, or it may be abandoned.

General Comments: Ormat-Truckhaven Geothermal Zone Change and General Plan Amendment Project

Action on a CalGEM Notice of Intention (NOI) is a discretionary act and is subject to CEQA. Imperial County Department of Planning and Development Services will act as the Lead Agency in satisfying CEQA requirements for the proposed Project, while CalGEM will be a Responsible Agency. A Responsible Agency complies with CEQA "by considering the EIR or negative declaration prepared by the Lead Agency and by reaching its own conclusions on whether and how to approve the project involved" (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15096(a)). CEQA requires an analysis of the environmental impacts of the proposed Project, including cumulative impacts; the identification of mitigation measures that could minimize any significant effects on the environment; and a monitoring-reporting program to ensure compliance with those mitigation measures adopted by the Lead Agency.

No well work may be performed on any oil, gas, or geothermal well without written approval from CalGEM. Well work requiring written approval includes, but is not limited to, drilling wells, modifications to well casings, and/or any abandonment or re-abandonment work. If abandonment is necessary, CalGEM regulates the top of a plugged and abandoned well's minimum and maximum depth below final grade. CCR §1723.5 states well casings shall be cut off at least five (5) feet but no more than 10 feet below grade.

CalGEM makes the following additional recommendations:

1. To ensure that present and future property owners are aware of (a) the existence of all wells located on the property, and (b) potentially significant issues

Jim Minnick
Imperial Co. Dept. of Planning and Development Services
March 26, 2024
Page 4 of 5

associated with any improvements near oil or gas wells, CalGEM recommends that information regarding project wells, and any other pertinent information obtained after the issuance of this letter, be communicated to the appropriate county recorder for inclusion in the title information of the subject real property.

2. CalGEM recommends that any soil containing hydrocarbons be disposed of in accordance with local, state, and federal laws. Please notify the appropriate authorities if soil containing significant amounts of hydrocarbons is discovered during development.

Specific Comments: Ormat-Truckhaven Geothermal Zone Change and General Plan Amendment Project

CalGEM regulatory conducts responsible agency reviews of CEQA documents. The scope of these reviews includes most issues with the MND as there are many elements of CalGEM regulations in the PRC and the CCR that address a range of issues, including biological resources. Specific comments related to this MND are listed below:

1. Specifics of each location, including latitude and longitude, should be included in the project description.
2. The air quality section of the MND should include the assumptions for the CalEEMod modeling. For example, is off-site vehicle traffic and truck hauling included in the CalEEMod analysis.
3. Specific studies conducted as part of the 2019 MND should be included in this MND, including air quality CalEEMod modeling and the biological resources survey results.
4. As the biological surveys were conducted in 2017, they could be considered out of date. A California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB) search of the area within 5 miles of the proposed Project site indicates that the only species of concern (threatened) is the western snowy plover along the lakeshore. As this area is 4–5 miles from the Project site, it is most likely not a concern, but the presence of this species should be discussed and the reasoning behind the lack of concern should be included in the MND.
5. As per aerial examination of the Project site, there is actually very little development in the area even though road infrastructure is shown on the MND maps, and the implication is that it is close to an urban area. This should be clarified in the MND.
6. On Table 3. POTENTIAL CONSULTATION AND PERMITTING REQUIREMENTS
 - a. The 2nd column (Type of Permit/Approval) is missing rework permit as a "Type of Permit/Approval" even though this work is mentioned in the fourth column and is a permit we would issue.
 - b. The 4th column (Purpose) is missing injection operations as a purpose even though our project approval letters are captured in the 2nd column as an injection permit.

Jim Minnick
Imperial Co. Dept. of Planning and Development Services
March 26, 2024
Page 5 of 5

7. In VII. Geology and Soils section of the document, page 71 has a discussion on subsidence and how it is mitigated. We suggest the addition of the following:

“Well field programs covering production and injection plans are required by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) for each major geothermal project. Detrimental subsidence from geothermal development would be avoided through careful permit review by CalGEM and the County, establishment of standards for each project, and through impact mitigation and monitoring programs. CalGEM requires the submission of monthly production and injection data and these are monitored for potential issues that may lead to subsidence. CalGEM's injection project approval also includes conditions for subsidence monitoring. Compliance with the well field program and adherence to standards established via coordination with CalGEM and the County would reduce any impacts associated with subsidence; therefore, there would be no impact.”

As indicated in PRC § 3714, CalGEM has jurisdictional authority over the drilling, operation, maintenance and abandonment of geothermal resources wells as to encourage the greatest ultimate economic recovery of geothermal resources, to prevent damage to life, health, property, and natural resources, and to prevent damage to, and waste from, the underground geothermal deposits, and to prevent damage to underground and surface waters suitable for irrigation or domestic purposes by reason of the drilling, operation, maintenance, and abandonment of geothermal resources wells. CalGEM does not regulate grading, excavations, or other land use issues.

The statutes and regulations related to geothermal resources can be found here:

<https://www.conservation.ca.gov/calgem/Pages/Oil,-Gas,-and-Geothermal-Rulemaking-and-Laws.aspx>

Should you have any questions, please contact me at 916-203-7785 or via email at jerry.salera@conservation.ca.gov .

Sincerely,

Jerry Salera

Senior Oil and Gas Engineer (Supv.)

cc: state.clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov
OLRA@conservation.ca.gov
jan.peres@conservation.ca.gov