

APPENDIX B-1

Revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) and Comments

August 2017

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REVISED NOTICE OF PREPARATION

To: State Agencies
Responsible Agencies
Local and Public Agencies
Interested Parties
Trustee Agencies

From: Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056
Fresno, CA 93703-6056
Contact: Kiti Buelna-Campbell

Subject: Revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report
On Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

Original NOP issued March 13, 2013

SCH #2013031043

Westlands Water District (WWD or District) will be the Lead Agency and will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project identified above. Westlands Water District is requesting comments on the scope and content of this EIR.

The original Notice of Preparation (NOP) was distributed for agency and public review on March 13, 2013. A public scoping meeting was held by WWD on April 9, 2013.

The distribution of this Revised NOP is intended to inform agencies and the public of changes to the plan that have been made since the original NOP was issued. These changes are listed below and described subsequently in this document.

- Reduction in size of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan area from approximately 24,000 acres to approximately 21,000 acres.
- Removal of the "Westlands Transmission Corridor" from the transmission plan.
- Removal of the "Helm-Gregg Transmission Corridor" from the transmission plan.
- Renaming of the "Henrietta-Gates Transmission Upgrades" to "WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor."
- Addition of the "WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor."

Due to the time limits mandated by State law, we ask that you respond at the earliest possible date, but *not later than thirty (30) days* after receipt of this notice, which date is anticipated to be October 2, 2017. Please submit your comments by 5:00 P.M. on October 2, 2017.

Please send your response to **Kiti Buelna-Campbell** at the address shown above. We will need the name of a contact person in your agency or organization.

Project Title: Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

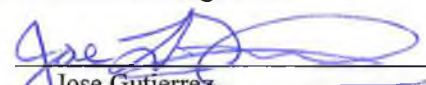
Project Location: Avenal Cutoff Road and Laurel Avenue, Kings County

Project Proponents: Westlands Water District and Westside Holdings LLC

Date: August 30, 2017

Signature:

Title:


Jose Gutierrez
Deputy General Manager - Resources

Reference: California Administrative Code, Title 24, Sections 15082(a), 15103, and 15375

1. Project Title

Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

WSP Master Plan and Gen-Tie Corridors Plan include:

1. Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan (see Figures 1 and 2)

Consisting of all or part of the following Sections:

- Township 20S Range 18E – Sections 24, 25, 34, 35
- Township 20S Range 19E – Sections 4-9, 14-23, 26-28, 30, 33-35
- Township 21S Range 19E – Sections 3-10, 16, 20, 21, 29-31
- Township 22S Range 19E – Section 6

2. WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

Consisting of the following two gen-tie corridors:

- a. WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor* – A new 230-kV transmission corridor running parallel and adjacent to the north side of Nevada Avenue (Kings County) and Jayne Avenue (Fresno County) from the WSP plan area to the Gates Substation (see Figures 1 and 2)
- b. WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor* – A new 230-kV transmission corridor running parallel and adjacent to the existing Henrietta to Gates transmission corridor, between the WSP plan area to the Gates Substation (see Figures 1 and 2)

2. Lead Agency Name and Address

Westlands Water District
3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056
Fresno, CA 93703-6056

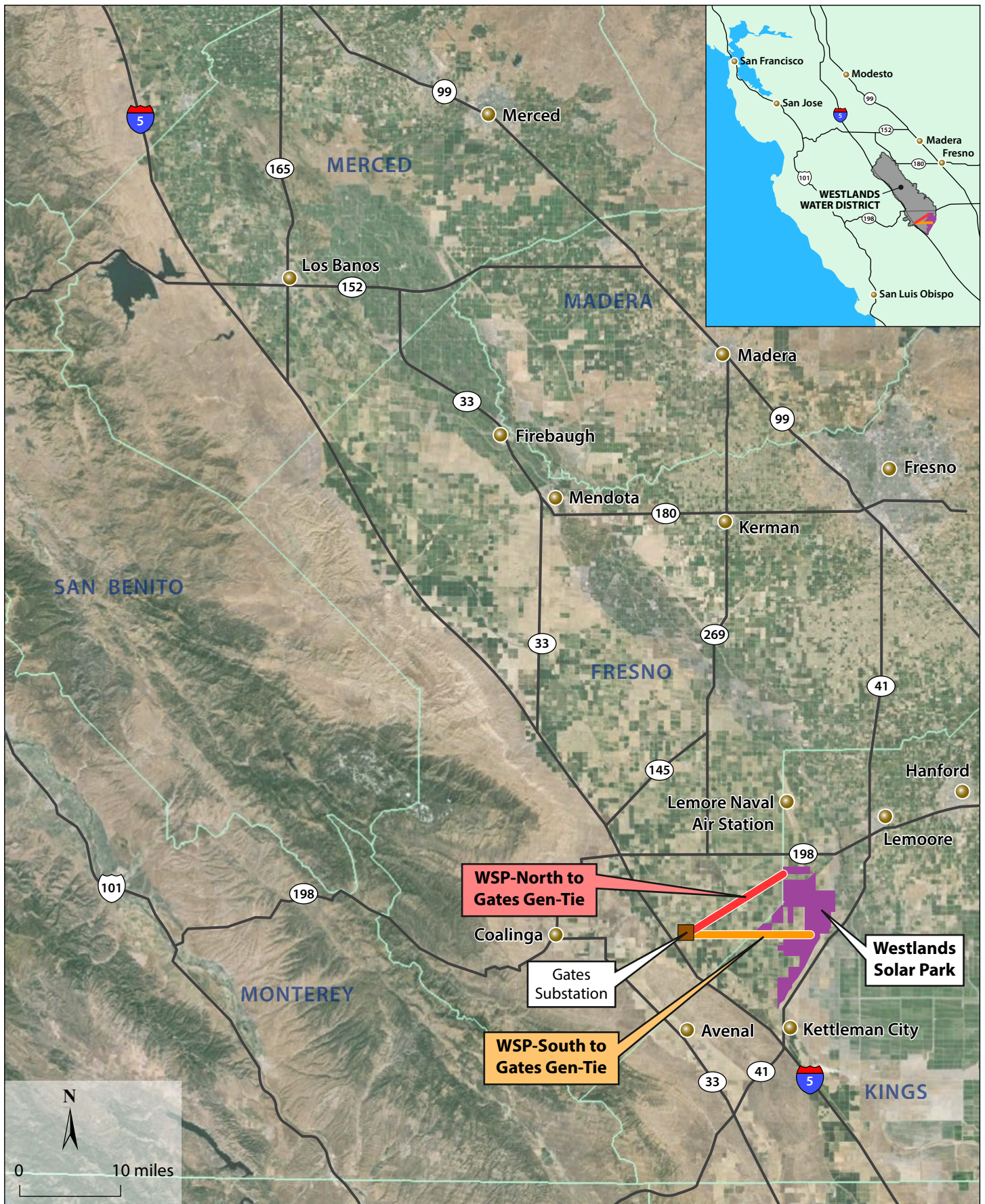
3. Contact Person and Phone Number

Kiti Buelna-Campbell, Senior Resources Engineer
(559) 224-1523

4. Project Location

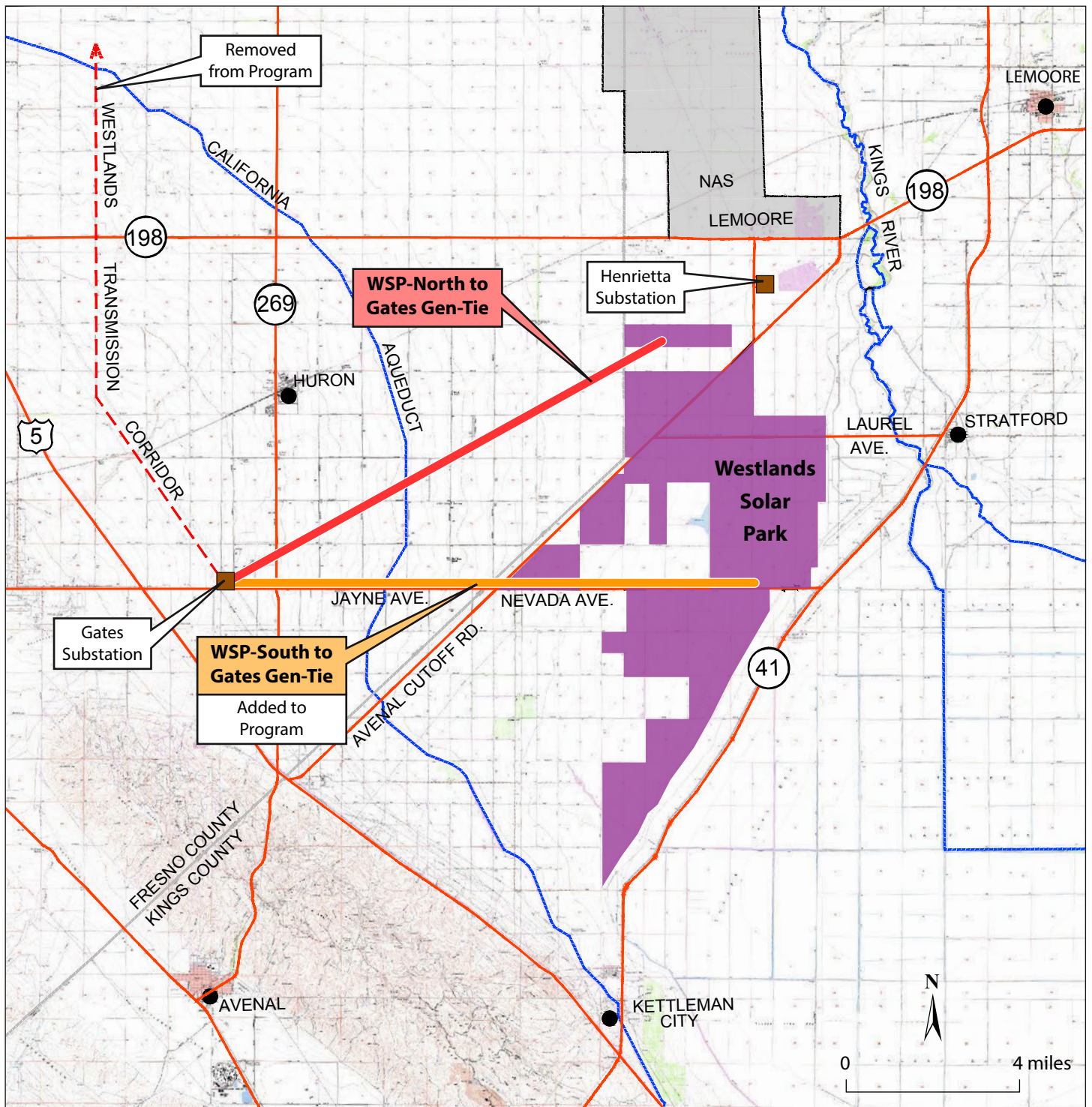
Westlands Solar Park Master Plan

The approximately 21,000-acre Westlands Solar Park (WSP) is located in west-central Kings County and is generally bounded by State Route 198 on the north, State Route 41 on the southeast, and the Fresno County line on the west. The WSP plan area consists almost entirely of agricultural land. There are no dwellings or agricultural buildings within the plan area. County roads that traverse the plan area include Avenal Cutoff Road, Laurel Avenue, and Nevada Avenue. Two high voltage transmission corridors pass through the northwest corner of the plan area in a northeast-southwest direction. A natural gas transmission pipeline traverses the WSP plan area in a northeast-southwest direction running parallel and southeast of Avenal Cutoff Road. A secondary pipeline branches off the main pipeline at Laurel Avenue and extends east along the south side of Laurel Avenue to Stratford.



Base map: Google Earth, 2016

Regional Location
Figure 1



WSP Vicinity
Figure 2

WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – This 350-foot wide corridor is planned to accommodate up to two parallel 230-kV double circuit transmission lines. The gen-tie corridor would run parallel and adjacent to the north side of Nevada Avenue (Kings County) and Jayne Avenue (Fresno County), for a distance of approximately 11.5 miles from the WSP plan area to the Gates Substation.

WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – This 350-foot wide corridor is planned to accommodate up to two parallel 230-kV double circuit transmission lines. The gen-tie corridor would run parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kV Henrietta-Gates transmission line, for a distance of approximately 11.5 miles from the northern portion of the WSP plan area to the Gates Substation.

5. Lead Agency and Project Sponsor Names and Addresses

Lead Agency

Westlands Water District
P.O. Box 6056
3130 N. Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93703-6056

And

Project Sponsor

Westside Holdings LLC
4125 W. Noble Avenue, #310
Visalia, CA 93277

6. General Plan

The 2035 Kings County General Plan categorizes all of the lands within the WSP plan area as “Agriculture Open Space.” The Land Use Element of the General Plan designates the lands within the plan area as either “General Agriculture – 40 Acre (South County)” or “Exclusive Agriculture – 40 acre.” General Plan “Land Use Objective B7.1” states: “Allow compatible Open Space and Public uses of land within the Agriculture Open Space area of the County.” GP “Land Use Policy B7.1.2” provides: “Power generation facilities for commercial markets shall be allowed and regulated through the Conditional Use Permit approval process, and include thermal, wind, and solar photovoltaic electrical generating facilities that produce power.”

The WSP plan area consists entirely of unincorporated territory, and no portion of the plan area lies within the Primary or Secondary Sphere of Influence of an incorporated City or within a Community District.

The Naval Air Station (NAS) Lemoore is located to the north of the WSP plan area and the majority of the plan area lies within the Military Influence Area (MIA) of NAS Lemoore. The northern portion of the WSP plan area is subject to NAS Height Restriction Zones “D” and “G” where maximum allowable structure heights are 500 feet in each zone. The County General Plan’s Exclusive Agriculture land use designation corresponds to lands subject to military aircraft noise levels of 70 dB CNEL or greater, and the applicable General Plan policy would limit or discourage land uses that would increase noise and safety risks to inhabitants. There are no other restrictions on WSP land use associated with NAS Lemoore.

7. Zoning

The majority of the WSP plan area is zoned “AG-40 (General Agriculture – 40 Acre Min.)” on the Zone Plan of Kings County, and the lands located north of Kansas Avenue are zoned “AX (Exclusive Agriculture).” Both zoning districts permit solar photovoltaic electrical generating facilities as a conditional use.

8. Description of Project

Summary of Changes to the Original Project

The plans for the Westlands Solar Park and related transmission projects have been modified during the several years since the original NOP was issued in March 2013. These changes are summarized below.

- a. Westlands Solar Park Master Plan – Some of the land areas included in the WSP Master Plan as described in the original NOP have been removed from the Master Plan Area. The lands removed consist of properties in the northern and south-central portions of the plan area. As a result, the overall land area included in the WSP Master Plan has been reduced from approximately 24,000 acres to approximately 21,000 acres, and the corresponding estimate of total generating capacity has been reduced from approximately 2,400 MW to approximately 2,000 MW, based on assumed development intensity of PV solar facilities of about 10 gross acres per MW. No new lands have been added to the plan area as described in the original NOP.
- b. Westlands Transmission Plan – The transmission plan described in the original NOP has been modified in several ways, as follows:
 - i. Westlands Transmission Corridor – The initial concept for this corridor was to have it include two segments that would mainly follow new alignments northward through the interior of Westlands Water District. The first segment would commence at the Gates Substation and diverge from the existing 230-kV transmission line (along I-5) near SR-198 east of Harris Ranch and head directly north to a point southwest of the Helm Substation. This 26-mile first segment from Gates to Helm was intended to be a joint transmission corridor to be shared with the Gates to Gregg corridor (described below). The second segment was planned to branch off at the Helm junction and head northwestward for about 20 miles to rejoin the I-5 corridor alignment which would then continue northwest parallel to the existing 230-kV transmission lines for a final 40 miles to the Los Banos Substation on SR-152 near Santa Nella. With the removal of the Gates to Gregg corridor from the Transmission Corridors Plan, the Westlands interior route lost one of its primary purposes as dual function corridor.
 - ii. Gates to Gregg Corridor – This new transmission corridor would connect the Gates Substation with the Gregg Substation located just north of Fresno. The southern 26-mile segment of this corridor was to be shared with the Westlands Transmission Corridor, as described above. Subsequently, PG&E initiated the separate Central Valley Power Connect (CVPC) project to construct a new transmission line between the Gates and Gregg substations. As such, the Gates to Gregg transmission element of the Westlands Transmission Plan became redundant and was therefore eliminated as part of the proposed project to be evaluated in this EIR.

Subsequent to removal of the Gates to Gregg corridor from the Westlands Transmission Plan, the original interior transmission route lost its primary beneficial attribute of providing for a joint transmission corridor with the Gates to Gregg corridor in the southern segment. Accordingly, a new preferred route for the Westlands Transmission Corridor was identified along the west side of the valley, with the transmission corridor running parallel and adjacent

to existing transmission lines near I-5. Subsequent to the identification of the west-side corridor, a separate interconnection application was filed with the federal Western Area Power Administration (WAPA or Western) to construct a new transmission line along the west side of the valley between the Gates Substation and the Dos Amigos Pumping Plant, and potentially further on to the Los Banos Substation. That transmission corridor will be the subject of a separate project-specific EIS/EIR. Since that joint NEPA/CEQA document will provide full project-level environmental review for a transmission line along the west side of the valley, the programmatic review of a westside transmission corridor that was originally planned in this EIR became redundant and was therefore eliminated as part of the proposed project to be evaluated in this EIR.

- iii. Henrietta-Gates Transmission Upgrades – Under the original transmission plan, the renewable energy generated at WSP was to be conveyed to the Gates Substation solely by an 11-mile transmission line running parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kV Henrietta-Gates transmission line. That transmission corridor is still part of the plan but has been renamed the “WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie.”
- iv. WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – This 11.5 mile transmission corridor has been added to the plan to serve the central and southern portions of the WSP plan area. This gen-tie corridor is described in further detail below.

Description of Current Project

The overall project covered by this EIR includes two main elements, consisting of: 1) the Westlands Solar Park (“WSP”) Master Plan, which is an overall plan of development for solar generating facilities within WSP; and 2) the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan. These project elements, which are described in further detail below, will receive program-level environmental review in the EIR.

Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan

The WSP Master Plan is intended to serve as the planning framework for a series of utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating facilities on about 21,000 acres in west-central Kings County, generally located south of SR-198, west of SR-41 and the Kings River, and east of the Fresno County Line. The combined generating capacity of WSP solar projects is estimated to be 2,000 MW, although the final power output could increase with improved solar PV module efficiency over the course of the WSP buildout period. The solar PV projects developed within WSP would have varying generating capacities, with the power output from individual solar facilities ranging up to about 250 MW. The installation of solar generating facilities is planned to occur incrementally over an approximately 12-year buildout period extending to about 2030. The rate of solar project installation is anticipated to range from about 20 to 250 MW per year, with the installation rate averaging about 167 MW per year over the 12-year buildout period. The WSP generating facilities would receive program-level review in the EIR.

WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

The Gen-Tie Corridors Plan sets forth the planned routes for the two gen-tie lines that would deliver WSP-generated electricity to the Gates Substation where it would be transferred to the State electrical grid, as described below.

- a. WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – This planned 230-kV gen-tie corridor would run parallel and adjacent to the Nevada-Jayne Avenue roadway right-of-way, commencing at a planned substation on Nevada Avenue near its junction with the 25th Avenue alignment and running westward along the north side of the roadway for 11.5 miles to the Gates Substation. This gen-tie corridor would serve as the first of two WSP gen-ties providing delivery of solar power from the

WSP to the Gates Substation. An optional configuration under consideration would consist of two parallel 230-kV gen-ties in this alignment, as an alternative to the northern gen-tie corridor described below. To accommodate the two parallel gen-tie lines within this southern gen-tie corridor, the corridor is planned to be 350-feet wide.

- b. WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – This second planned 230-kV transmission corridor would run parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kV Henrietta-Gates transmission line, commencing at a planned substation in the northern portion of WSP, and running southwestward for 11.5 miles to the Gates Substation. As mentioned above, this northern gen-tie alignment may not be pursued if it is ultimately determined that it would be preferable to add a second parallel gen-tie line along the Nevada-Jayne Avenue alignment described above. Alternatively, it is possible that this corridor may include two parallel 230-kV gen-tie lines. To accommodate the two parallel gen-tie lines, this corridor is also planned to be 350-feet wide.

Project Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan are as follows:

Overall Goals

The Westlands Solar Park Master Plan is intended to fulfill the following goals of the Project:

- 1) To provide an overall plan to guide and facilitate the beneficial reuse of drainage-impaired lands through development of renewable energy generation in the Westlands Competitive Renewable Energy Zone (CREZ).
- 2) To establish the preferred transmission gen-tie corridors to convey WSP-generated renewable energy to the statewide electricity market. Establishment of these routes would facilitate deliveries of renewable energy generation from drainage-impaired lands of the Westlands Solar Park to the state electrical grid.

Project Objectives of the WSP Master Plan

- Generate approximately 2,000 megawatts of clean, renewable electrical power utilizing solar photovoltaic (PV) technology and deliver the electrical output to the State's electrical grid. (The estimated overall generating capacity for WSP could increase with improvements to solar PV module efficiency during the course of the buildout period for WSP.)
- Contribute to the solution of area-wide agricultural drainage problems by retiring all of the lands within the WSP plan area and providing productive reuse of those lands for renewable energy production as an alternative to irrigated agriculture.
- Provide for the economically viable and environmentally beneficial reuse of the WSP plan area's physically impaired agricultural soils.
- Contribute to the reduction in overdraft of the aquifer for supplemental irrigation.
- Reduce cumulative salt loading to the groundwater resource.
- Constructively address the frequent shortage of surface water deliveries by removing the least productive farmland from irrigation by imported water, and by facilitating the redirection of scarce surface water allocations from the WSP plan area to more productive agricultural land within Westlands Water District that is not physically impaired by saline soils, high groundwater, or high selenium or other mineral concentrations. (This applies only to the

privately-owned western half of the WSP plan area. The WWD-owned lands in the eastern half of the WSP plan area have already been retired from irrigated agriculture.)

- Provide utility-scale power generation on physically-impaired farmland in order to reduce pressure for renewable energy development on prime agricultural soils elsewhere.
- Provide for development of utility-scale solar generation facilities on highly disturbed lands which provide minimal habitat value for wildlife.
- Provide a low-impact alternative location for the siting of utility-scale renewable energy development that might otherwise occur on lands with high habitat value for protected wildlife species (such as the Mojave Desert).
- Provide utility-scale solar generation in a location that is already served by high-voltage transmission lines.
- Help implement the State's goal of increased electrical generation to 50 percent with renewable resources by 2030 under California's Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS).
- Help implement the California Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative (RETI) by providing for the development of up to 5,000 MW of the solar resource within the Westlands CREZ. (It is noted that the Westlands CREZ received the highest state-wide environmental ranking among all CREZs designated through the RETI process.)
- Contribute to overall reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by generating electricity that is not based on the combustion of fossil fuel, pursuant to The California Global Warming Solutions Act (AB 32), as extended and supplemented with SB 32 in 2016.
- Create new employment opportunities for local residents.
- Positively contribute to the local economy through stimulation of economic activity such as creation of secondary multiplier employment and the purchase of materials and services.
- Provide community benefits through increased property tax and sales tax revenues.

Project Objectives of the Gen-Tie Corridors

- Provide delivery of renewable solar power from the Westlands Solar Park to the State's electrical grid while minimizing impacts to the environment.

Purpose of the EIR on the WSP Master Plan and Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

The purpose and function of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Gen-Tie Corridors Plan EIR is to provide program-level CEQA review and clearance for the following actions by the Westlands Water District Board of Directors:

- Adoption of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan as the policy and planning framework for incremental development of solar PV generating facilities within the WSP plan area.
- Adoption of the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan for delivery of WSP renewable solar generation to the State electrical grid at the Gates Substation.

9. Surrounding Land Uses and Setting

WSP Plan Area – The lands of the WSP plan area and surrounding areas consist almost entirely of cultivated agricultural land. The WSP site includes no residential or non-residential structures. The Shannon Ranch complex is located just off-site to the west at the intersection of Avenal Cutoff Road and Gale Avenue. The ranch complex consists of 20 single-family units of worker housing, a ranch office, a machine shop, various other outbuildings and infrastructure facilities, and an airstrip. The

remaining lands surrounding the WSP site are sparsely settled. Apart from the Shannon Ranch described above, there are a total of 6 dwellings located within one mile of the project boundary, two of which are located on the south side of Nevada Avenue at the Stone Land Company Ranch.

WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – The 11.5-mile long south gen-tie corridor follows the north side of Nevada and Jayne Avenues along the edges of lands in active agricultural cultivation. The gen-tie corridor passes near two rural dwellings on the south side of Nevada Avenue, and a series of 8 rural dwellings on the south side of Jayne Avenue. The gen-tie corridor also passes around a cold storage facility on the north side of Jayne Avenue before crossing over the California Aqueduct and State Route 269 on its approach to the Gates Substation.

WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor – The approximately 11.5-mile long north gen-tie corridor commences from the northern portion of the WSP plan area and heads southwestward along the south side the existing Henrietta-Gates 230-kV transmission line. The corridor passes through agricultural fields and orchards, crossing the California Aqueduct and then Lassen Avenue/SR-269 en route to the Gates Substation. There are 10 rural dwellings within one mile of the north gen-tie corridor, the nearest of which is 0.3 miles from the corridor.

10. Actions and Approvals by the Lead Agency and Other Public Agencies

This EIR is intended to provide program-level CEQA review for agencies with jurisdiction with respect to the Westlands Solar Park and/or the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors. These agencies and their approval or coordination actions are listed below.

Westlands Water District

- Adoption of WSP Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan – The certification of this EIR will serve as CEQA compliance for WWD Board of Directors' adoption of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan as District planning policy.

County of Kings

Individual solar projects proposed within WSP would be subject to the several discretionary approvals from Kings County, as listed below. Kings County decision-makers may utilize the program-level environmental review of this EIR in preparing second-tier project-specific environmental documents on discretionary approvals for individual solar projects proposed within the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan area, and associated gen-tie projects.

- Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) for individual solar development projects proposed within WSP, and for gen-tie segments located within Kings County.
- Vesting Tentative Parcel Maps (or Lot Line Adjustments) to create land divisions corresponding to the boundaries of the individual solar projects, as necessary.
- Encroachment Permits for work in County road rights-of-way, and for utility crossings over or under County roads.

Western Area Power Administration (Western or WAPA)

It is anticipated that Western will serve as the federal lead agency in sponsoring the separate Westside Transmission Project (Gates to Dos Amigos/Los Banos). Western would be the federal Lead Agency for preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) portion of the joint EIS/EIR under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The information and analysis contained in this EIR with respect to the WSP and associated gen-ties may be relied upon in preparing the joint EIR/EIS on the Westside Transmission Project.

California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC)

It is anticipated that the WSP gen-tie projects will be privately constructed and operated, and thus will not be subject to the approval jurisdiction of the CPUC. However, it is possible that some or all of the WSP gen-tie projects, substations, and substation upgrades (and possible switching stations) may ultimately be constructed by or for PG&E, which is subject to the regulatory authority of the CPUC. The CPUC would issue Permits to Construct (PTCs), or Certificates of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCNs) (the latter are required for any transmission projects requesting ratepayer funding). The CPUC may utilize the information in this EIR to inform their decisions and approvals.

It is noted that the California Energy Commission (CEC) has no jurisdiction over the WSP solar PV projects. The CEC has no jurisdiction over solar PV projects, and only has jurisdiction over concentrating solar (thermal solar) projects over 50 MW. The CEC also does not have jurisdiction over permitting of transmission projects. The CEC has authority to designate Transmission Corridor Zones under California law, which is a voluntary program for prospective transmission corridor proponents. A Transmission Corridor Zone designation from CEC is not required for the construction of a transmission line.

Other Agencies

In addition, the information in this EIR may be used by the following responsible and trustee State, regional, and local agencies for their separate permit and review processes in conjunction with subsequent approvals of individual solar generating facilities proposed within the WSP, and associated gen-tie projects.

- County of Fresno: 1) Approval of unclassified conditional use permits for gen-tie segments located in Fresno County; 2) Encroachment permits for work in County road rights-of-way; 3) Building permits and other ministerial permits (does not apply to upgrades within existing substation fence lines). (Note: Public utility projects that are subject to approval by CPUC are exempt from local discretionary approval under CPUC General Order 131-D, although coordination with local jurisdictions regarding consistency with plans and policies is required. Thus, if one or both of the gen-tie segments located within Fresno County are subject to CPUC jurisdiction, the County would review the WSP gen-tie projects for consistency with County plans and policies. However, it is anticipated that the WSP gen-tie projects will be privately constructed and operated, and thus will not be subject to the approval jurisdiction of the CPUC, but will instead be subject to local land use approval authority.)
- San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD): 1) Indirect Source Review (ISR) under Air District Rule 9510; 2) Approval of construction Dust Control Plans under Air District Regulation VIII; 3) Compliance with other Air District rules and regulations (e.g., Rule 4601 for asphalt paving; Rule 2010 permit to operate for equipment greater than 50 horsepower resulting in emissions; Rule 2280 registration for portable equipment resulting in emissions).
- Regional Water Quality Control Board – Central Valley Region (CVRWQCB): 1) Administration of General Permit for Storm Water Discharges Related to Construction Activities under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES), including review and approval of Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plans (SWPPPs); 2) Water quality certification (or waiver) for any planned work in ‘Waters of the State’ under the State Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act and/or ‘Waters of the U.S.’ under Section 401 of the federal Clean Water Act.
- California Department of Transportation (Caltrans): 1) Encroachment permits for utility crossings over state highways; 2) Oversize/overweight permit and Traffic Control Plan.

- California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW): 1) Streambed Alteration Agreement under Sections 1601-1602 of the California Fish and Game Code for any work in or alteration of a creek or other water body; 2) Coordination and permitting under the California Endangered Species Act for any potential impacts to State-protected species.
- California Department of Water Resources (DWR): 1) Encroachment permits for gen-tie crossings over the California Aqueduct.
- US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE): 1) Authorization for any work in or alteration of a federally-designated wetland or 'Waters of the U.S.' under Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act.
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): 1) Coordination and permitting under the federal Endangered Species Act for any potential impacts to federally-protected species; 2) Coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in connection with any potential Section 404 permits under the federal Clean Water Act.

11. Probable Environmental Effects

The EIR will address all checklist items contained in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines. The following is preliminary list of environmental topics to be addressed in the EIR.

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| ▪ Aesthetics | ▪ Hydrology and Water Quality |
| ▪ Agricultural Resources | ▪ Land Use and Planning |
| ▪ Air Quality (and Greenhouse Gas Emissions) | ▪ Noise |
| ▪ Biological Resources | ▪ Paleontological Resources |
| ▪ Cultural Resources (and Tribal Cultural Resources) | ▪ Public Services |
| ▪ Geology and Soils (and Mineral Resources) | ▪ Transportation and Traffic |
| ▪ Hazards and Hazardous Materials | ▪ Utilities and Service Systems |

Cumulative Impacts

Each topical EIR section listed above will include an analysis of cumulative impacts.

Other Checklist Items

Those checklist items that are determined to have negligible or no impact associated with them will be briefly discussed in an EIR chapter entitled "Effects Found Not to Be Significant" as provided under Section 15128 of the CEQA Guidelines. The non-significant impact categories are expected to include: Forestry Resources; Population and Housing; and Recreation.

Other CEQA-Mandated Analyses

In addition to the topical impact discussions listed above, the EIR will also address the summary analyses required under CEQA, including the following: Alternatives to the Proposed Action; Growth-Inducing Effects; Significant and Unavoidable Impacts; Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes; and Energy Conservation.

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES

1416 NINTH STREET, P.O. BOX 942836
SACRAMENTO, CA 94236-0001
(916) 653-5791



September 28, 2017

Kiti Buelna-Campbell
Westlands Water District
3130 N. Fresno Street
P.O. Box 6056
Fresno, CA 93703

Notice of Preparation (NOP) for Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR); near Kettleman City, in Kings County and Fresno County, California Aqueduct, near Mileposts 159.24 and 161.60, San Luis Field Division.

Dear Ms. Buelna-Campbell,

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the NOP for WSP Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan draft EIR. The NOP describes the proposal of: 1) WSP Master Plan consisting of a 21,000-acre plan area to accommodate solar photovoltaic generating facilities generating a total generating capacity of approximately 2,000 MW with construction to be phased over 12 years; 2) WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan – including two gen-tie corridors: a) WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie – an 11.5-mile gen-tie corridor extending from the WSP plan area in a 350-foot corridor along Nevada-Gates Avenues to the Gate Substation; b) WSP-North of Gates Gen-Tie – an 11.5-mile gen-tie corridor running parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kV Henrietta-Gates transmission line from the northern portion of the WSP plan area southwestward to the Gates Substation.

Department of Water Resources (DWR) has comments regarding the Project. The following items shall be addressed in the next environmental review:

1. Any construction within Department of Water Resources (DWR) right-of-way will require an Encroachment Permit from DWR.
2. Overhead Electrical and Communication Utilities Crossings over the California Aqueduct must comply with DWR regulations.

Information regarding regulations and forms for submitting an application for an encroachment permit to DWR can be found at:

http://www.water.ca.gov/engineering/Services/Real_Estate/Encroach_Rel/

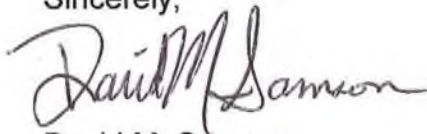
Kiti Buelna-Campbell
September 28, 2017
Page 2

Please provide DWR with a copy of any subsequent environmental documentation when it becomes available for public review. Any future correspondence relating to the above-mentioned concerns of DWR should be sent to:

California Department of Water Resources
Division of Operations and Maintenance
State Water Project Right-of-Way Management Section
Attn: Leroy Ellinghouse
1416 Ninth Street, Room 641-1
Sacramento, California 95814

If you have any questions, please contact Leroy Ellinghouse, Chief, State Water Project Right-of-Way Management Section, at (916) 653-7168 or Robert Martinez at (916) 654-8982.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David M. Samson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "David" being more prominent.

David M. Samson
Civil Engineering Services
Department of Water Resources

cc: State Clearinghouse
Office of Planning and Research
1400 10th Street
Sacramento, CA 95814



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
Central Region
1234 East Shaw Avenue
Fresno, California 93710
www.wildlife.ca.gov

EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



September 27, 2017

Kita Buelna
Westlands Water District
3130 North Fresno Street
Post Office Box 6056
Fresno, California 93703

Subject: Revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR); Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan; SCH No. 2013031043

Dear Ms. Buelna:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) has reviewed the above NOP of a Draft EIR for the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan (Project) submitted by the Westlands Water District (District). Approval of the Project would serve as the planning framework for a series of utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating facilities (Westlands Solar Park, WSP) for a combined capacity of 2,000-mega-watts on approximately 21,000 acres of land that will be phased over a period of 12 years and construction of new transmission lines; a) WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor an 11.5-mile long and 350-foot wide gen-tie corridor extending from the central portion of the WSP plan area west along Nevada-Gates Avenues to the Gates Substation that would accommodate up to two parallel 230-kV double circuit transmission lines, and b) WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor: an 11.5-mile long and 350-foot wide gen-tie corridor that runs parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kilo-volt (kV) Henrietta-Gates transmission line from the northern portion of the WSP plan area extending southwestward to the Gates Substation that would accommodate up to two parallel 230-kV double circuit transmission lines. The Project site is generally bounded by State Route 198 to the north, State Route 41 to the southeast, and the Fresno County line to the west, within an unincorporated area of Kings and Fresno Counties, California.

It appears to the Department that the Revised NOP package is not complete and that perhaps multiple pages are missing. Based on the limited information the Department has available, the Department has the following general comments. Once the Draft EIR is circulated for review, the Department may have additional or more specific comments. It is the Department's understanding that the Project site is composed of agricultural land that is being retired from agricultural use due to drainage and soil chemical composition issues. However, these issues do not preclude the use of the Project site by special status species. The Department recommends the District include a thorough evaluation of species that have the potential to be impacts by any phase of the Project development and include specific avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures for each species that is identified. Please refer to the species list provided in the General Comments below.

Page 7 of the NOP states that each phase proposed for development will receive program-level environmental review in the EIR. The Department assumes this means that each proposed development phase that makes up the Project will have additional California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents prepared that include development-specific analysis and avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures. The Department recommends the District define "program-level" review in the Draft EIR.

Department Jurisdiction

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Authority: The Department is a Trustee Agency for fish and wildlife resources with the responsibility under CEQA for commenting on projects that could impact fish and wildlife resources. In this role, the Department is responsible for providing, as available, biological expertise to review and comment on environmental documents and impacts arising from project activities. Pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 1802, the Department has jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species.

California Endangered Species Act (CESA) Authority: The Department has regulatory authority over projects that could result in the "take" of any species listed by the State as threatened or endangered pursuant to CESA. If the Project could result in the take of any species listed as threatened or endangered under CESA, the Department may need to issue an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for the Project. CEQA requires a Mandatory Finding of Significance if a project is likely to substantially impact threatened or endangered species (Sections 21001(c), 21083, Guidelines sections 15380, 15064, 15065). Impacts must be avoided or mitigated to less than significant levels unless the CEQA Lead Agency makes and supports a Statement of Overriding Consideration (SOC). The CEQA Lead Agency's SOC does not eliminate the Project proponent's obligation to comply with Fish and Game Code Section 2080.

Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA): The Department also has regulatory authority with regard to activities occurring in streams and/or lakes that could adversely affect any fish or wildlife resource, pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 1600 *et seq.* If the proposed Project would substantially divert water and/or alter the bed, bank, or channel of a lake and/or stream or associated riparian vegetation, an LSAA Notification would be warranted. The Department is required to comply with CEQA in the issuance or the renewal of an LSAA. Therefore, for efficiency in environmental compliance, the Department recommends that the CEQA document prepared for this Project describe and propose mitigation for any Project activities under the Department's regulatory authority under Fish and Game Code Section 1600 *et seq.* This would reduce the need for the Department to require extensive additional environmental review for an LSAA for this Project in the future. For additional information on notification requirements, please contact Department staff in the Lake and Streambed Alteration Program at (559) 243-4593.

Fully Protected Species: The Department has jurisdiction over fully protected species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles, and fish pursuant to Fish and Game Code sections 3511, 4700, 5050, and 5515. Take of any fully protected species is prohibited and the Department cannot authorize their take.

Bird Protection: The Department has jurisdiction over actions which may result in the disturbance or destruction of active nest sites or the unauthorized take of birds. Sections of the Fish and Game Code 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).

Water Quality Protection: Pursuant to Fish and Game Code Section 5650, it is unlawful to deposit in, permit to pass into, or place where it can pass into a "Waters of the State" any substance or material deleterious to fish, plant life, or bird life. Additionally, Fish and Game Code Section 5652 prohibits the deposition of any cans, bottles, garbage, motor vehicle or parts thereof, or rubbish within 150 feet of the high water mark of the Waters of the State (or where they can pass in to any Waters of the State).

General Comments

Because of the size extent of the solar development and transmission line corridors, wildlife species have the potential to be impacted during implementation of the Project. The Department recommends that the District conduct a biological assessment to determine what habitat types, vegetation communities, streams, and wetlands and other waters exist within the entire Project footprint and in the Project vicinity. The biological assessment would provide a baseline on wildlife potentially impacted through construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning activities and provide avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to be included in the Draft EIR. The species listed in Table 1 below are known to occur in the Project site's vicinity.

Table 1 – Special Status Wildlife Species in the Project Vicinity			
Common Name	Scientific Name	State Status	Federal Status
blunt-nosed leopard lizard	<i>Gambelia sila</i>	Threatened/Fully Protected	Threatened
Nelson's antelope squirrel	<i>Ammospermophilus nelsoni</i>	Threatened	
Swainson's hawk	<i>Buteo swainsoni</i>	Threatened	
San Joaquin kit fox	<i>Vulpes macrotis mutica</i>	Threatened	Endangered
Tipton kangaroo rat	<i>Dipodomys nitratoideis nitratoideis</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Western snowy plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus nivosus</i>		Threatened
Giant garter snake	<i>Thamnophis gigas</i>	Threatened	Threatened
California least tern	<i>Sternula antillarum browni</i>	Endangered	Endangered
California Jewelflower	<i>Caulanthus californicus</i>	Endangered	Endangered
Kern mallow	<i>Eremalche parryi ssp. kernensis</i>	1B	Endangered
San Joaquin woollythreads	<i>Monolopia congdonii</i>	1B	Endangered
Burrowing owl	<i>Athene cunicularia</i>	SSC	
Tricolored blackbird	<i>Agelaius tricolor</i>	Candidate	

American badger	<i>Taxidea taxus</i>	SSC	
Tulare grasshopper mouse	<i>Onychomys torridus tularensis</i>	SSC	
Lemmon's jewelflower	<i>Caulanthus lemmonii</i>	1B	
Recurved larkspur	<i>Delphinium recurvatum</i>	1B	

1B=California Rare Plant Rank 1B; rare throughout their range with the majority of them endemic to California

SSC=State Species of Special Concern

Threatened/Endangered/Candidate=listing designation under either the State Endangered Species Act (CESA) or federal Endangered Species Act (ESA)

To ensure that potential Project impacts are adequately identified and addressed, the Department recommends the District require that additional development-specific biological assessments be conducted prior to approval of each development phase and subsequent species-specific surveys be conducted when findings during the biological assessments indicate that such surveys are warranted throughout the transmission line corridors and within the solar development area as necessary. Conduct species-specific surveys according to Department-accepted protocols, which can be found at the Department website at

http://www.dfg.ca.gov/wildlife/nongame/survey_monitor.html. If the Department website does not contain a survey protocol for a particular species, the Department recommends the District require each facility proponent to submit a proposed protocol to the Department and/or the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for review and approval prior to implementation.

Conversion from agricultural lands to solar facilities has the potential to displace wildlife species and impact foraging opportunities. In perpetuity, habitat conservation should be included as a mitigation measure in the Draft EIR or other CEQA documents prepared for each development phase of the Project where the conversion of agricultural lands to solar results in potentially significant impacts. In many cases, conservation of agricultural land would be appropriate.

The Department recommends including the following general mitigation measures in the Draft EIR and any subsequent CEQA documents prepared for individual phases.

1. Restrict outdoor lighting except as necessary for safety.
2. Require that all lights be shielded, pointed downward, and directed away from adjacent habitat.
3. Require motion sensor-type nighttime lighting so that the lights do not stay on constantly and interfere with nocturnal wildlife activities.
4. Install perimeter fencing so that the bottom of the fence is 5 to 7 inches above the ground surface and knuckled under to create a smooth edge to allow for unimpeded movement of wildlife through the project sites. This will help avoid wildlife connectivity issues posed by this large scale solar Project.
5. Require that all vertical pipes associated with solar mounts or chain-link fencing be capped at the time of installation to prevent entrapment and death of birds.

6. Prohibit the use of rodenticides. If rodenticide use is allowed, obtain an ITP from the Department for listed species such as San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*, SJKF), Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*, SWHA), and any other State-listed species known to occur in the Project site's vicinity before starting rodenticide use.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the NOP for this renewable energy project. If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact Lisa Gymer, Senior Environmental Scientist Specialist, at the address on this letterhead, by telephone at (559) 243-4014, extension 238, or by electronic mail at lisa.gymer@wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,



Julie A. Vance
Regional Manager

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

Debra Mahnke
Regional Water Quality Control Board
1685 E Street, Suite 100
Fresno, California 93706

State Clearinghouse
Post Office Box 3044
Sacramento, California 95812-3044

ec: California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Annee Ferranti, Central Region
Lisa Gymer, Central Region



September 18, 2017

Kiti Buelna-Campbell
Westlands Water District
3130 N. Fresno Street
Fresno, CA 93703-6056

Project: Revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

District CEQA Reference No: 20170993

Dear Ms. Buelna-Campbell:

The San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District (District) has reviewed the Revised Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan Project. The WSP Master Plan is intended to serve as the planning framework for a series of utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) generating facilities on approximately 21,000 acres generating approximately 2,000 megawatts (MW) and the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan consists of setting forth planned routes for two gen-tie lines that would deliver WSP generated electricity to the Gates Substation where it would be transferred to the State electrical grid (Project). The Project is located south of State Route 198, west of State Route 41 and the Kings River in west-central Kings County. The District offers the following comments:

Emissions Analysis

- 1) At the federal level for the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS), the District is currently designated as extreme nonattainment for the 8-hour ozone standards; nonattainment for the PM2.5 standards; and attainment for the 1-Hour ozone, PM10 and CO standards. At the state level, the District is currently designated as nonattainment for the 8-hour ozone, PM10, and PM2.5 California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS). The District recommends that the Air Quality section of the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) include a discussion of the following impacts:

Seyed Sadredin
Executive Director/Air Pollution Control Officer

Northern Region
4800 Enterprise Way
Modesto, CA 95356-8718
Tel: (209) 557-6400 FAX: (209) 557-6475

Central Region (Main Office)
1990 E. Gettysburg Avenue
Fresno, CA 93726-0244
Tel: (559) 230-6000 FAX: (559) 230-6061

Southern Region
34946 Flyover Court
Bakersfield, CA 93308-9725
Tel: 661-392-5500 FAX: 661-392-5585

- a) **Criteria Pollutants:** Project related criteria pollutant emissions should be identified and quantified. The discussion should include existing and post-Project emissions.

i) Construction Emissions

Construction activities include: the transport of materials to the construction site; on-site land preparation and panel installation; off-site construction activities necessary for operation of the facility (new power lines, substation, etc.); and construction employee commute.

Equipment exhaust, as well as fugitive dust emissions should be quantified. Project related short-term (construction) impacts should be considered significant if, with the implementation of mitigation measures, emissions exceed 10 tons per year of oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), 10 tons per year of reactive organic gases (ROG), or 15 tons per year particulate matter of 10 microns or less in size (PM₁₀).

- *Recommended Mitigation:* To reduce impacts from construction related exhaust emissions, the District recommends feasible mitigation for the Project to utilize off-road construction fleets that can achieve fleet average emissions equal to or cleaner than the Tier III emission standards, as set forth in §2423 of Title 13 of the California Code of Regulations, and Part 89 of Title 40 Code of Federal Regulations. This can be achieved through any combination of uncontrolled engines and engines complying with Tier III and above engine standards.

ii) Operational Emissions

Operational activities include: the transport of water to the site, if applicable; panel cleaning; vehicles and equipment used on-site; deliveries to the site; and employee commute.

Emissions from permitted (stationary) sources and non-permitted (mobile) sources should be analyzed separately. Project related long-term (operational) impacts should be considered significant if, with the implementation of mitigation measures, emissions exceed 10 tons per year of oxides of nitrogen (NO_x), 10 tons per year of reactive organic gases (ROG), or 15 tons per year particulate matter of 10 microns or less in size (PM₁₀).

- *Recommended Mitigation:* Project related impacts on air quality can be reduced through incorporation of design elements, for example, that increase energy efficiency, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and reduce construction exhaust related emissions. However, design elements and compliance with District rules and regulations may not be sufficient to

reduce project related impacts on air quality to a less than significant level. Another example of a feasible mitigation measure is the mitigation of project emissions through a Voluntary Emission Reduction Agreement (VERA). The VERA is an instrument by which the project proponent provides monies to the District, which is used by the District to fund emission reduction projects that achieve the reductions required by the lead agency. District staff is available to meet with project proponents to discuss a VERA for specific projects. For more information, or questions concerning this topic, please call District Staff at (559) 230-6000.

- iii) **Recommended Model:** Project related criteria pollutant emissions should be identified and quantified. Emissions analysis should be performed using CalEEMod (**C**alifornia **E**mission **E**stimator **M**odel), which uses the most recent approved version of relevant Air Resources Board (ARB) emissions models and emission factors. CalEEMod is available to the public and can be downloaded from the CalEEMod website at: www.caleemod.com.
- b) **Nuisance Odors:** The project should be evaluated to determine the likelihood that the project would result in nuisance odors. Nuisance odors are subjective, thus the District has not established thresholds of significance for nuisance odors. Nuisance odors may be assessed qualitatively taking into consideration of project design elements and proximity to off-site receptors that potentially would be exposed objectionable odors.
- c) **Health Impacts:** Project related health impacts should be evaluated to determine if emissions of toxic air contaminants (TAC) will pose a significant health risk to nearby sensitive receptors. TACs are defined as air pollutants that which may cause or contribute to an increase in mortality or serious illness, or which may pose a hazard to human health. The most common source of TACs can be attributed to diesel exhaust fumes that are emitted from both stationary and mobile sources. Health impacts may require a detailed health risk assessment (HRA).

Prior to conducting an HRA, an applicant may perform a prioritization on all sources of emissions to determine if it is necessary to conduct an HRA. A prioritization is a screening tool used to identify projects that may have significant health impacts. If the project has a prioritization score of 1.0 or more, the project has the potential to exceed the District's significance threshold for health impacts of 20 in a million and an HRA should be performed.

If an HRA is to be performed, it is recommended that the project proponent contact the District to review the proposed modeling approach. The project would be considered to have a significant health risk if the HRA demonstrates that project related health impacts would exceed the District's significance threshold of 20 in a million.

More information on TACs, prioritizations and HRAs can be obtained by:

- E-mailing inquiries to: hramodeler@valleyair.org; or
- Visiting the District's website at:

http://www.valleyair.org/busind/pto/Tox_Resources/AirQualityMonitoring.htm.

2) In addition to the discussions on potential impacts identified above, the District recommends the EIR also include the following discussions:

- a) A discussion of the methodology, model assumptions, inputs and results used in characterizing the project's impact on air quality. To comply with CEQA requirements for full disclosure, the District recommends that the modeling outputs be provided as appendices to the EIR. The District further recommends that the District be provided with an electronic copy of all input and output files for all modeling.
- b) A discussion of the components and phases of the project and the associated emission projections, including ongoing emissions from each previous phase.
- c) A discussion of project design elements and mitigation measures, including characterization of the effectiveness of each mitigation measure incorporated into the project.
- d) A discussion of whether the project would result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant or precursor for which the San Joaquin Valley Air Basin is in non-attainment. More information on the District's attainment status can be found online by visiting the District's website at: <http://valleyair.org/aqinfo/attainment.htm>.

District Rules and Regulations

3) Based on information provided, the proposed Project meets the applicability threshold within District Rule 9510 (Indirect Source Review) of 9,000 square feet of other land uses. Therefore, per Section 2.1 of the rule the District concludes that the proposed Project is subject to District Rule 9510.

- a) Any applicant subject to District Rule 9510 is required to submit an Air Impact Assessment (AIA) application to the District no later than applying for final discretionary approval, and to pay any applicable off-site mitigation fees.
- b) If approval of the subject Project constitutes the last discretionary approval by your agency, the District recommends that demonstration of compliance with District Rule 9510, including payment of all applicable fees be made a condition of Project approval. Information about how to comply with District Rule 9510 can be found online at: www.valleyair.org/ISR/ISRHome.htm.

- 4) The proposed Project may be subject to District rules and regulations including, but not limited to: Regulation VIII (Fugitive PM10 Prohibitions), Rule 4102 (Nuisance), Rule 4601 (Architectural Coatings), and Rule 4641 (Cutback, Slow Cure, and Emulsified Asphalt, Paving and Maintenance Operations). The proposed Project may also require District permits. The applicant is strongly encouraged to contact the District prior to the start of construction to identify other District regulations that apply to this project and determine if an Authority to Construct (ATC) is required. District's Small Business Assistance (SBA) staff can be reached by phone at (559) 230-5888. A complete list of current District rules can be found online at: www.valleyair.org/rules/1ruleslist.htm.
- 5) The District recommends that a copy of the District's comments be provided to the project proponent.

District staff is available to meet with you and/or the applicant to further discuss the regulatory requirements that are associated with this project. If you have any questions or require further information, please call Sharla Yang at (559) 230-5934.

Sincerely,

Arnaud Marjollet
Director of Permit Services



For Brian Clements
Program Manager

AM: sy



James Chuang
Senior Environmental Specialist

Southern California Gas Company
Sempra Energy utilities
GT17E2
555 Fifth Street
Los Angeles, Ca. 90013
Tel: 213-244-5817
Fax: 323 518 2324

10/2/2017

Ms. Kiti Buelna-Campbell
Westlands Water District
3130 N. Fresno Street
P.O. Box 6056
Fresno, CA 93703-6056

Re: Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plans

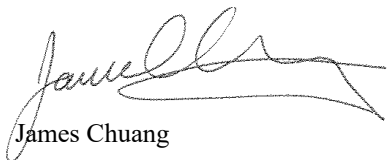
Dear Ms. Campbell:

Southern California Gas Company (SoCalGas) appreciates the opportunity to review and respond to the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plans. SoCalGas understands that the proposed project would involve development of the Westland Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan which would serve as the planning framework for a series of utility-scale solar PV energy generating facilities on approximately 21,000 acres in west-central Kings County. The proposed project would also include development of the WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan which would set forth planned routes for two gen-tie lines that would deliver WSP-generated electricity to the Gates Substation where it would be transferred to the State electrical grid. Both plans are analyzed at the programmatic level under the DEIR. We respectfully request that the following comments be incorporated in the administrative record for the DEIR:

- SoCalGas has a 20-inch high pressure transmission pipeline that traverses the WSP area running parallel Avenal Cutoff Road and a 12-inch high pressure pipeline branching northbound from the transmission line approximately halfway between Laurel Avenue and Jackson Avenue.
- SoCalGas recommends that the project proponent call Underground Service Alert at 811 at least two business days prior to performing any excavation work for future activities evaluated under both proposed plans. Underground Service Alert will coordinate with SoCalGas and other Utility owners in the area to mark the locations of buried utility-owned lines.
- Should it be determined that any future development facilitated by the proposed plans may require SoCalGas to abandon and/or relocate or otherwise modify any portion of its existing natural gas lines, SoCalGas respectfully requests that the County and/or the project proponent coordinate with us by calling (800) 427-2000 for Non-residential to follow-up on this matter.

Once again, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on the DEIR. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact SoCalGas Environmental Review at Envreview@semprautilities.com or (213) 244-5817.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Chuang", with a stylized flourish extending from the end.

James Chuang
Senior Environmental Specialist
Southern California Gas Company

Cc/ Jennifer Pezda, SoCalGas



September 22, 2017

Kiti Buelna-Campbell
Westlands Water District
PO Box 6056
Fresno, CA 93703-6056

Delivered via email to kcampbell@westlandswater.org

RE: Revised Notice of Preparation – Draft Environmental Impact Report for Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Westlands Solar Park Gen-Tie Corridors Plan

Dear Ms. Campbell:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the revised notice of preparation (NOP) for the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) being prepared for the Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan (Project). The EIR is intended to provide program-level CEQA review and clearance for the following actions by the Westlands Water District Board of Directors:

- Adoption of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan as the policy and planning framework for the incremental development of solar photovoltaic (PV) generating facilities within the WSP plan area.
- Adoption of the Westlands Solar Park Gen-Tie Corridors Plan for delivery of WSP renewable solar generation to the State electrical grid at the Gates Substation.

These comments are submitted on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders); a non-profit environmental organization with 1.2 million supporters nationally, including 170,000 in California. We previously provided comments relative to the March 2013 NOP for this project.

Defenders is dedicated to protecting all wild animals and plants in their natural communities. To that end, Defenders employs science, public education and participation, media, legislative advocacy, litigation, and proactive on-the-ground solutions in order to prevent the extinction of species, associated loss of biological diversity, and habitat alteration and destruction.

Defenders strongly supports the State of California's emission reduction and climate goals. The development of renewable energy is a critical component of efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, avoid the worst consequences of global warming, and assist California in meeting its mandated emission reductions. We also support the development of renewable energy production in appropriate locations, with the application of sound impact avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures.

In meeting our renewable energy portfolio standard in California, we urge that renewable energy projects be located in environmentally suitable locations and designed in the most sustainable manner possible. Like any project, "Smart from the Start" planning is essential. Such projects should be sited in a manner that avoids impacts to our native wildlife, plants, limited water supplies, prime agricultural lands and well-being of local communities. Proximity to areas of electrical end-use should be emphasized to both maximize energy transmission efficiency and benefit local communities.

California Program Office
980 9th Street, Suite 1730
Sacramento, CA 95814
Telephone 916-313-5800
Fax 916-313-5812
www.defenders.org/california

The proposed Project includes the Westlands Solar Park (WSP) Master Plan and WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan. The WSP would be located in the unincorporated area of west-central Kings County and the gen-tie facilities would traverse portions of Kings and Fresno Counties. The components of the Project are as follows:

Westlands Solar Park Master Plan

The WSP Master Plan is intended to serve as the planning framework for a series of utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) energy generating facilities on approximately 21,000 acres generally located south of SR-198, west of SR-41 and the Kings River, and east of Fresno County. The WSP Master Plan area consists almost entirely of highly disturbed and chemically impaired cultivated agricultural land. There are no dwellings or agricultural buildings within the plan area. The future solar generating facilities will consist solely of PV solar arrays and associated electrical equipment and interconnections, along with support facilities, substations, and other utilities infrastructure. Individual solar PV projects would be built incrementally within the WSP and would have varying generating capacities depending on size and technology. The combined generating capacity of WSP is estimated to be 2,000 MW, however the final power output could increase with improved solar PV technology. Individual projects are expected to range in size up to 250 MW. Buildout is expected to take approximately 12 years with an average of 167 MW (or 1,670 acres) developed per year. Individual projects proposed within the WSP would be subject to CEQA review and discretionary approval by Kings County.

WSP Gen-Ties Corridors Plan

The WSP Gen-Tie Corridors Plan addresses the two gen-tie lines that would deliver power from the WSP to the Gates Substation in Fresno County where it would then be transferred to the State electrical grid. The two proposed gen-tie lines are:

WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie Corridor

This new 11.5± mile, 230-kV transmission line would run parallel and adjacent to the existing Nevada and Jayne Avenues from WSP to the Gates Substation. The corridor would begin at a planned substation in WSP near the junction of Nevada Avenue and 25th Avenue in Kings County. It would then run westward along the north side of Nevada Avenue to the Fresno County line where Nevada Avenue becomes Jayne Avenue. The line would continue to run westward along the north side of Jayne Avenue in Fresno County until it reached the Gates Substation. Although two corridors (WSP-South and WSP-North) are planned, an optional configuration would run both transmission lines parallel together in just one of the corridors. The corridors are both planned to be 350' to accommodate this flexibility.

WSP-North to Gates Gen-Tie

This second new 11.5± mile, 230-kV transmission line would be constructed in Kings and Fresno Counties. This line would begin at a planned substation in the northern portion of the WSP site in Kings County and then run southwestward to the Gates Substation in Fresno County. It would be located parallel and adjacent to the existing 230-kV Henrietta-Gates transmission line. This northern gen-tie alignment may not be pursued if it is ultimately determined that a second parallel gen-tie along the WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie would be preferable. Alternatively, this gen-tie corridor may accommodate parallel WSP gen-ties if the WSP-South to Gates Gen-Tie is not utilized. This corridor is planned to be 350 wide to accommodate two parallel gen-tie lines.

Comments

The proposed Project represents a comprehensive approach to renewable energy development on highly disturbed land which, due to drainage and chemical complications, is severely impaired for continued agricultural use and is being retired from farming. Defenders has long advocated for just this type of master planned renewable energy development and is pleased to see WSP moving forward. At the same time, the Project, if built, would entail the significant conversion of open lands to the light industrial nature of a solar power plant. Although the WSP plan area is highly disturbed and impaired, the site does provide some habitat for special status species. The 23± miles of new transmission lines also traverse the potential habitat of a variety of special status species. The proposed Project could result in the loss of habitat and displacement of State and Federally listed wildlife species including:

blunt-nosed leopard lizard (*Gambelia sila*)

California Jewelflower (*Caulanthus californicus*)

California least tern (*Sternula antillarum brownii*)

Kern mallow (*Eremalche parryi* ssp. *kernensis*)
Nelson's antelope squirrel (*Ammospermophilus nelsoni*)
San Joaquin kit fox (*Vulpes macrotis mutica*)
San Joaquin woollythreads (*Monolopia congdonii*)
Swainson's hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*)
Tipton kangaroo rat (*Dipodomys nitratoideus nitratoideus*)

The DEIR should provide the following:

Science Based Baseline Biological Information

The proposed Project is located within the known territory of special status species and the WSP and gen-tie corridors may be occupied or utilized by these species. Biological field surveys for these species must be completed and the analysis, and any mitigation strategies, in the DEIR must be based on these studies. Without survey information, any impact analysis would be tenuous and incomplete and it would not be possible to ascertain if any proposed mitigation measures are appropriate. We recommend WSP and Westlands Water District engage in full consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for guidance on impact assessment and mitigation and that the appropriate level of surveys be completed.

Whole Project Addressed

The DEIR must address the whole of the project including the construction, operation and maintenance of tap lines, telco/fiber optic lines, and substations located both on and off-site.

Compensatory Mitigation for Loss of Habitat

The proposed Project including the transmission facilities has the potential to impact habitat for a number of State and Federal threatened and endangered species. This loss of habitat could be significant and would need to be mitigated through the establishment of compensatory mitigation at prescribed ratios. Again, this mitigation should be determined through consultation with FWS and CDFW.

Project Construction and Operation Protocols Must be Wildlife Friendly

The DEIR, in consultation with FWS and CDFW, must identify project construction and operation protocols to avoid and minimize impacts to wildlife. Protocols could include construction and operation protocols, buffer zones, shielded lighting, and a prohibition on the use of rodenticides.

Security Fence Must be Wildlife Friendly

Utility scale solar PV projects typically include security fences around each site's perimeter. These fences can result in a significant barrier to wildlife. Security fences must be designed to be wildlife friendly and allow safe passage of San Joaquin Valley kit fox and other species. In the event that chain-link fencing is used, the bottom of the fence must be raised 5-7 inches off the ground and knuckled under along the entire perimeter, thereby permitting easy under-passage by foxes at any location.

Transmission Lines

The Project proposes up to 23± miles of new transmission lines. While there is a clear need for additional transmission capacity to facilitate renewable energy development in the region, development of that capacity carries the potential for both direct and indirect impacts. The siting of the additional transmission and associated facilities will directly affect where renewable energy development occurs. "Smart from the Start" transmission facility siting which avoids high value farmland and habitat lands will foster future renewable energy development which also avoids high value farmland and habitat. The DEIR must address both alternatives to routing as well as the potential for grow-inducing impacts resulting from additional capacity.

Cumulative Impact Analysis

The proposed Project is just one of many solar projects proposed or permitted in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Cumulatively these projects have the potential to convert thousands of acres from agricultural and open lands to the light industrial land use of a utility scale solar power plant. This is in addition to impacts resulting from residential, industrial, and infrastructure development, and other types of energy development. The cumulative loss of agricultural, habitat, and foraging lands must be addressed in the DEIR.

Conclusion

Defenders is very pleased to see the proposed Westlands Solar Park and related gen-tie facilities project moving forward into CEQA review. We strongly encourage WSP and the Westlands Water District to coordinate and work closely with CDFW and FWS to incorporate the necessary biological analysis and to develop appropriate strategies to avoid, minimize and mitigate any impacts to biological resources from the proposed Project.

We look forward to reviewing the DEIR for this Project. Please include us in any notices for the proposed Project. Thank you once again for the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the Westlands Solar Park project and for considering our comments. If you have any questions, please me at (916) 313-5800 x1 or via email at kdelfino@defenders.org.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kim Delfino", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kim Delfino
California Program Director

Cc:

Julie Vance, CDFW
Bert Verrips, Verrips Consulting
Dan Kim, Westlands Solar Park

October 2, 2017

Comments of the California Consumers Alliance regarding:

Westlands Water District's Revised Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report on Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Gen-Tie Corridor Plan.

Introduction:

California Consumers Alliance (CCA) is an organization established for the purpose of providing consumers with access to the technical and analytical resources needed to fully and effectively participate in electric regulatory matters affecting consumers including Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)-jurisdictional transmission planning processes. CCA members are electricity consumers who reside and work in the service territories of the State's Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs): PG&E, SCE, and SDG&E. The IOUs' transmission facilities comprise a major portion of California's integrated high voltage electrical grid that serves customers of the IOUs and other Load Serving Entities. Our organization works with subject matter experts and analysts with experience in the complex fields of energy markets, transmission planning, generation technologies, and regulatory policy. CCA advocates for efficient, cost effective and environmentally sensitive solutions to the identified needs of the State's electrical grid.

We appreciate the Westlands Water District's notification of the Revised Notice of Preparation of Draft EIR... and the opportunity to respond.

Concerns:

1) Missing Facts:

CCA finds the overall approach employed by the Westlands Water District (WWD) for its "Planned Transmission" to be fundamentally lacking. As pointed out in our previously submitted comments, the WWD's original NOP contains unsubstantiated claims regarding the "need" for and "cost effectiveness" of WWD's proposed transmission facilities. During the scoping meeting on April 9, 2013, a WWD representative made unproven statements regarding insufficient power and grid capacity in the Fresno area. Unfortunately the revised NOP fails to address these factual shortcomings.

Notwithstanding the modifications outlined in the revised NOP, it is noted that WWD fully intends to proceed with a 500 kV transmission line parallel to interstate 5, however, that

project will no longer be analyzed within WWD's EIR, but is being passed on to the Western Area Power Administration to handle.

Since the original intent remains largely in place, we request WWD clarify whether it still holds its position that the full build-out of Westlands Solar Park solar development will require; 1) transmission upgrades to convey the generated power to the Gates Substation, and; 2) the addition of transmission capacity to the existing 500-kV Central California Transmission Corridor along U.S. Interstate 5. If so, please provide the supporting evidence.

2) Additional Clarifications sought:

WWD's revised NOP is ambiguous regarding who would own, operate, and maintain the Gen-Ties Corridors. This information is critical to understanding; 1) the purpose; 2) who the beneficiaries are, and thus; 3) who is required to pay for the planned Gen Ties.

The original NOP indicated that the purpose of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Planned Transmission Facilities is to facilitate the reuse of drainage-impaired farmland within Westlands Water District for renewable energy development, and to provide the means for efficient interconnection of Westlands solar power generation to the State electrical grid, the Helms Pumped Storage Facility, and the Fresno-area electrical market.

We recognize that reuse of lands remains a goal. What is not clear however, is whether WWD's other previously stated project objectives remain in place.

In the original NOP of EIR, various project objectives are attached specifically to each of three transmission corridors. Since only the Henrietta–Gates corridor, (renamed WSP North-Gates Gen-Tie) remains included in the revised NOP, should stakeholders assume that all project objectives previously attributed to the Westlands Transmission Corridor and the Helm-Gregg Corridor are likewise removed/eliminated?

3) Project Alternatives:

For the record, CCA continues to urge examination and consideration of feasible alternatives. In addition to our 3 previously submitted recommendations (please note our alternatives I, II, and III should be updated with the most recent RPS portfolios and preferred resource assumptions—available from the CPUC and CEC) please consider the following:

a. CCA Alternative IV: Distributed Generation

WWD is anticipating 2000 MW of solar PV in the WSP area between 2018 and 2030. Even if a need for this capacity is established, distributed PV is better for California than remote utility-scale PV. Distributed PV avoids the need for building large transmission lines which would add significant costs. Furthermore utility-scale PV and associated transmission lines reduces reliability (delivery to load), reduces system resiliency, increases costs due to line losses, congestion, operation and maintenance, increases chances of fire, creates challenges for responders engaging in fire suppression, and, causes environmental degradation.

Please note that the Distributed PV alternative, along with simply fallowing drainage-impaired lands in the WSP area would fulfill most of the Project Objectives. An added benefit is that occasional flooding, which is likely to occur in the WSP study area, would not impact distributed generation resources. Moreover, occasional flooding in the vicinity of the Tulare Lake bed would serve to recharge ground water thus helping to alleviate ongoing subsidence and related impacts to public infrastructure in the WSP area.

b. CCA Alternative V: Collector System and DCTL in a Single Corridor

The WSP Master Plan contemplates two 230 kV corridors. The northern corridor cuts diagonally across active farmland. If and when the need for this project is firmly established, CCA's transmission planning expert recommends consideration be given to a single double-circuit 230 kV gen-tie in the southern gen-tie corridor. A single double circuit tower line would reduce the width of the required right of way, and therefore reduce costs and impacts. Furthermore CCA's qualified expert suggests the WSP plan be modified to include an underground collector system for the entire WSP area with the hub of the collector system being at the southern end of the WSP area. This hub would be at the eastern terminus of the southern gen-tie corridor. Consideration could be given to a single 500 kV gen-tie instead of double circuit 230 kV gen-tie. However 500 kV towers are taller and 500 kV transformers are larger than 230 kV transformers.