

CHAPTER 1.0 – INTRODUCTION

The Proposed Project is the construction and operation of a commercial lithium hydroxide production plant (ATLiS Plant) within the Salton Sea geothermal field in Imperial County, California. The ATLiS Plant will process geothermal brine from the neighboring Hudson Ranch Power I Geothermal Plant (HR1) to produce lithium hydroxide, as well as zinc and manganese products which would be sold commercially.

The Proposed Project would consist of the following activities:

- Construction and operation of a plant to extract lithium, manganese, zinc, and other commercially viable substances from geothermal brine and process the extracted substances to produce commercial quantities of lithium and, to the extent possible, manganese and zinc products and other products
- Construction and operation of brine supply and return pipelines and other associated interconnection facilities with the HR1 power plant
- Construction of a primary access road from McDonald Road (approximately 500 feet west of the HR 1 entrance), a second primary access about 800 feet west, and an emergency access entrance only from Davis Road
- Paving of McDonald Road from State Route 111 (Highway 111) to English Road (approximately 2 miles)
- Construction of a power interconnection line from the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and HR1 switchyard located at the northeast corner of the HR1 site
- Construction of associated facilities between HR1 and the Project site to facilitate the movement of brine and other services
- Construction of a laydown yard that will also support temporary offices during construction as well as serve as a truck management yard during operations
- Construction of offices, repair facilities, shipping and receiving facilities, and other infrastructure including the relocation of the IID structures and road improvements at Highway 111

This section of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will discuss the purpose of the Draft EIR, scope, content, and environmental review process. The Project is described in further detail in Chapter 2.0, Project Description.

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

The Project requires discretionary approval of the County Environmental Evaluation Committee and Board of Supervisors and is subject to environmental review requirements in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). All “projects” within the State of California are required to undergo environmental review to determine any potential environmental impacts associated with project implementation (Section 15021).

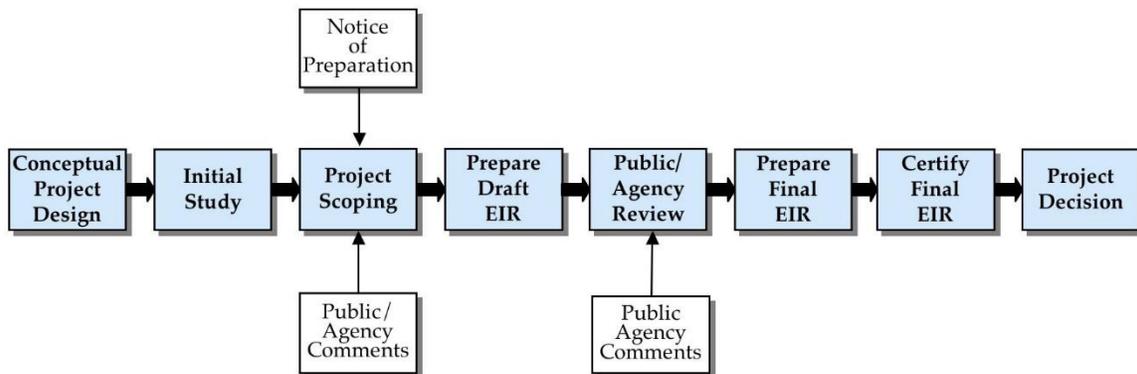
CEQA was enacted in 1970 by the California Legislature to disclose to decision-makers and the public the significant environmental effects of a proposed project and to identify possible ways to avoid or minimize significant environmental effects of a project by requiring implementation of mitigation measures or recommending feasible alternatives. CEQA applies to all California agencies at all levels, including local, regional, and State governments, as well as boards, commissions, and special districts. Imperial County

(County), the Lead Agency for the Project, is required to conduct an environmental review to analyze any potential environmental effects associated with project implementation.

A Project EIR or an EIR has been prepared to evaluate impacts of the Proposed Project. Section 15161 of the CEQA Guidelines states that a Project EIR “... examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. This type of EIR should focus primarily on the changes in the environment that would result from the development project. The EIR shall examine all phases of the project including planning, construction, and operation.”

The Draft EIR is then circulated to the public and affected agencies for review and comment. One of the primary objectives of CEQA is to enhance public participation in the planning process; public involvement is an essential feature of this process. Community members are encouraged to participate in the environmental review process, request to be notified, monitor newspapers for formal announcements, and submit substantive comments at every possible opportunity afforded by the lead agency. The environmental review process provides ample opportunity for the public to participate through scoping, public notice, and public review of CEQA documents. A diagram illustrating the CEQA process is shown in Figure 1.0-1 below. Additionally, a Lead Agency is required to respond to public comments in Final EIRs and consider comments from the scoping process in the preparation of the Draft EIR.

Figure 1.0-1: The Environmental Review Process



1.2 ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

1.2.1 Scoping Process

In compliance with Section 15201 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the County has taken steps to provide opportunities for public participation in the environmental process. An Initial Study (IS) and Notice of Preparation (NOP) were distributed on December 11, 2020 to State, regional, local government agencies, and interested parties for a 34- day public review period to solicit comments and to inform agencies and the public of the Project. The proposed Project was described, potential environmental effects associated with Project implementation were identified, and agencies and the public were invited to review and comment on the IS and NOP.

The County received comments from two state agencies, Native American Heritage Commission and California Department of Transportation, and two local agencies, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District and Imperial Irrigation District. The IS, NOP, and received comments are contained in Appendix A of this Draft EIR. The purpose of the NOP was to formally convey to the public that the County was preparing a Draft EIR for the proposed Project and to solicit input regarding the scope and content of the

environmental information to be included in this Draft EIR. Additionally, the Project was presented to the Environmental Evaluation Committee (EEC) and a scoping meeting was held, both on January 14, 2021. No participants attended the scoping meeting.

Topics evaluated in this Draft EIR have been identified based on the IS prepared for the Project, the responses to the NOP, the review of the proposed Project by County staff, and the comments made during the EEC meeting. Specific comments regarding the amount of and transportation of hazardous wastes were noted during the EEC meeting, which were address in Section 4.12: Utilities and Service Systems. The County determined through this initial review process that impacts related to the following environmental topics are potentially significant and require an assessment in this Draft EIR:

1. Air Quality
2. Biological Resources
3. Cultural Resources
4. Energy
5. Geology and Soils
6. Greenhouse Gas Emissions
7. Hazards and Hazardous Materials
8. Hydrology and Water Quality
9. Noise
10. Transportation
11. Tribal Cultural Resources
12. Utilities and Service Systems

Mitigation measures to reduce impacts to a less than significant level are proposed whenever feasible. Table 1.0-1 contains this list of sections required under CEQA Guidelines, along with reference to the chapter where these items can be found.

Table 1.0-1: Required EIR Contents

Chapter Title (CEQA Guidelines)	Location
Table of Contents (Section 15122)	Table of Contents
Summary (Section 15123)	Executive Summary
Introduction (Section 15122)	Chapter 1
Project Description (Section 15124)	Chapter 2
Environmental Setting (Section 15125)	Chapter 3
Consideration and Discussion of Environmental Impacts (Section 15126)	Chapter 4
Mitigation Measures (Section 15126.4)	Chapter 4.1-4.12
Cumulative Impacts (Section 15130)	Chapter 4.1-4.12
Alternatives to the Proposed Project (Section 15126.6)	Chapter 5
Growth-inducing Impacts (Section 15126.2)	Chapter 6
Effects Found Not to Be Significant (Section 15128)	Chapter 6
Organizations and Persons Consulted (Section 15129)	Chapter 7 and 8
List of Preparers	Chapter 8
Acronyms/Abbreviations	Chapter 9

1.2.2 Review and Comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report

The Draft EIR for the Project is being distributed directly to numerous agencies, organizations, and interested groups and persons for comment during the formal review period. The Draft EIR is also available for review at the following locations in the County:

- City of El Centro Public Library, 539 State Street, El Centro, California

This document is available for review online at the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department (ICPDSD) website: <http://www.icpds.com>

Interested individuals, organizations, responsible agencies, and other agencies can provide written comments about the Draft EIR addressed to:

David Black, Planner
Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department
801 Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243

Agency responses to the Draft EIR should include the name of a contact person within the commenting agency. Due to the time limits mandated by State law (CEQA Guidelines Section 15205[d]), comments must be sent to the County at the earliest possible date but not later than close of business on August 17, 2021, which is 50 days after publication of this notice.

1.3 ORGANIZATION OF THE DRAFT EIR

The Draft EIR is organized into the following chapters so the reader can easily obtain information about the Proposed Project and related environmental issues:

- Executive Summary – Presents a summary of the Proposed Project and alternatives, potential impacts and mitigation measures, and impact conclusions regarding growth inducement and cumulative impacts.
- Chapter 1: Introduction – Describes the purpose and use of the Draft EIR, provides a brief overview of the Proposed Project, and outlines the organization of the Draft EIR.
- Chapter 2: Project Description – Describes the project location, project details, and the City's overall objectives for the Project.
- Chapter 3: Environmental Setting – Describes the baseline environmental setting and existing physical conditions, including related projects in the area.
- Chapter 4: Environmental Analysis – Describes the existing conditions, or setting, before project implementation; methods and assumptions used in impact analysis; thresholds of significance; impacts that would result from the Proposed Project; and applicable mitigation measures that would eliminate or reduce significant impacts for each environmental issue.
- Chapter 5: Alternatives Analysis – Evaluates the environmental effects of project alternatives, including the No Project Alternative and Environmentally Superior Project Alternative.

- Chapter 6: Other CEQA Considerations – Includes a discussion of issues required by CEQA that are not covered in other chapters. This includes unavoidable adverse impacts, impacts found not to be significant, irreversible environmental changes, and growth-inducing impacts.
- Chapter 7: References – Identifies the documents and individuals consulted in preparing the Draft EIR.
- Chapter 8: Report Preparation – Lists the individuals involved in preparing the Draft EIR and organizations and persons consulted.
- Chapter 9: Acronyms/Abbreviations – Presents a list of the acronyms and abbreviations.

Appendices – Present data supporting the analysis or contents of this Draft EIR. The Appendices include the following:

- **APPENDIX A** – Initial Study and Environmental Analysis for the Energy Source Mineral ATLiS Project, December 2020, Chambers Group, Inc., NOP, and NOP Comment Letters.
- **APPENDIX B** – Air Quality Assessment Hudson Ranch Mineral Recovery, County of Imperial, June 17, 2021, Ldn Consulting, Inc.
- **APPENDIX C** – Biological Technical Report (BTR) for the Energy Source Mineral Project Imperial County, California, December 2020, Chambers Group, Inc.
- **APPENDIX D** – Archaeological and Paleontological Assessment Report for the Energy Source Mineral, LLC Project, Calipatria, Imperial County, California, January 2021, Chambers Group, Inc.
- **APPENDIX E** – Geotechnical Report, Proposed Mineral Extraction Facility, 409 West McDonald Road, Calipatria, California, October 2019, LandMark Consultants, Inc.
- **APPENDIX F** – Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, Hudson Ranch Geothermal Plant, 409 West McDonald Road, Calipatria, California, August 2020, LandMark Consultants, Inc.
- **APPENDIX G** – Hudson Ranch Greenhouse Gas Screening Letter – County of Imperial, June 6, 2021, Ldn Consulting, Inc.
- **APPENDIX H** – Energy Calculations, April 2021, Vista Environmental.
- **APPENDIX I** – Noise Worksheets, April 27, 2021, Vista Environmental.
- **APPENDIX J** – Water Supply Assessment – Energy Source Minerals, LLC, April 21, 2021, Dubose Design Group.
- **APPENDIX K** – Traffic Impact Analysis, Hudson Ranch Mineral Recovery, County of Imperial, California, June 22, 2021, Linscott Law & Greenspan Engineers.
- **APPENDIX L** - Assembly Bill (AB) 52 Tribal Consultation