Imperial County Planning & Development Services
Planning / Building

Jim Minnick
DIRECTOR

TO: Commissioner Mike Goodsell, Chairman
Commissioner Yvonne Cordero
Commissioner Jerry Arguelles
Commissioner Marlynn Lopez

FROM: James Minnick, Secretary
Airport Land Use Commission

SUBJECT: Review of the Seville 5 Solar and Battery Storage Project for Consistency with the 1996 Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUC 11-25)

DATE OF REPORT: November 19, 2025

AGENDA ITEM NO: 6

HEARING DATE: November 19, 2025

HEARING TIME: 6:00 p.m.

HEARING LOCATION: County Administrative Center
Board of Supervisors Chambers
940 Main Street
El Centro, CA 92243

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

It is Staff's recommendation that the Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC) find the proposed Seville 5 Solar and Battery Storage project to be consistent with the 1996 Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

PROJECT LOCATION:

The project site is located on Assessor Parcel Number 018-010-043-000. This parcel encompasses approximately 270 acres in unincorporated Imperial County, California. The project is located approximately 0.40 miles south of State Route (SR) 78, approximately 7 miles east of the unincorporated community of Ocotillo Wells, and approximately 7 miles west of SR 86. The project site is approximately 14 miles west from the southern tip of the Salton Sea and 4 miles east of the Imperial County-San Diego County line. Local unpaved roads provide access to the project site from SR 78. Federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are located immediately west and northeast of the project site

THE PROJECT:

Apex Energy Solutions, LLC (project applicant) proposes to construct and operate the project, consisting of four primary components: 1) 65-MW PV energy generation facility; 2) 130-MW BESS; 3) on-site substation; and 4) an interconnection line to the Titan II substation with ultimate delivery to IID's existing 92-kV "R" Line. These four components together are collectively referred to as the "proposed project" or "project."

DESIGNATED AREA PLAN: The Project site is currently designated as Agriculture and the proposed General Plan Amendment will add a RE Renewable Energy Overlay zone to site

GENERAL PLAN ANALYSIS:

The proposed solar and battery development project with an approved conditional use permit for solar and battery storage development.

The Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan, Chapter 2, "Policies", Section 3 "Types of Actions Reviewed include.,

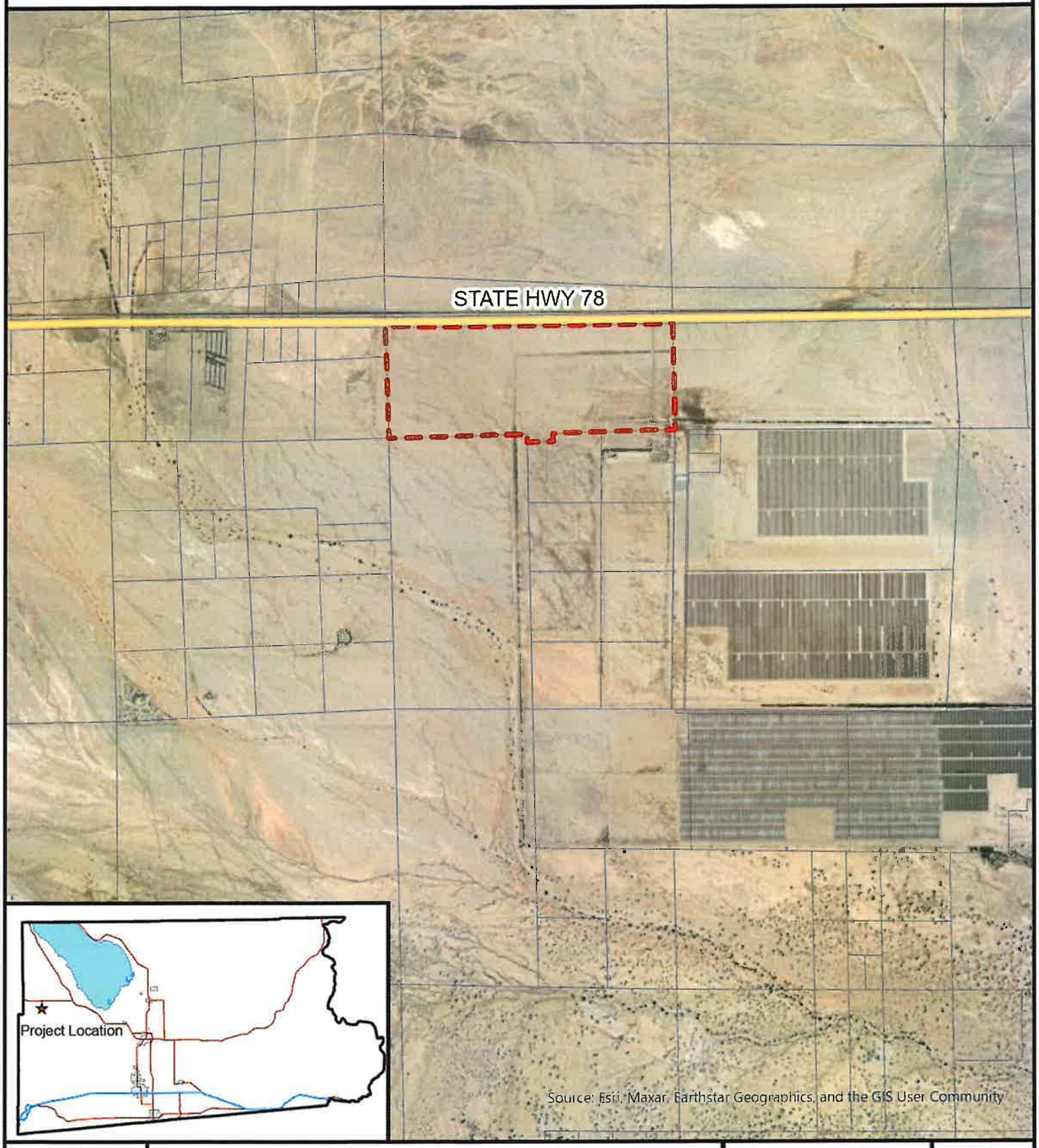
> "...(a) the adoption or approval of any amendment to a general plan or specific plan affecting the Commission's geographic area of concern

It is staff's position that the proposed Seville 4 Solar and Battery Storage project could be found consistent with the 1996 Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan.

ATTACHMENT "A"

Vicinity Map

PROJECT LOCATION MAP



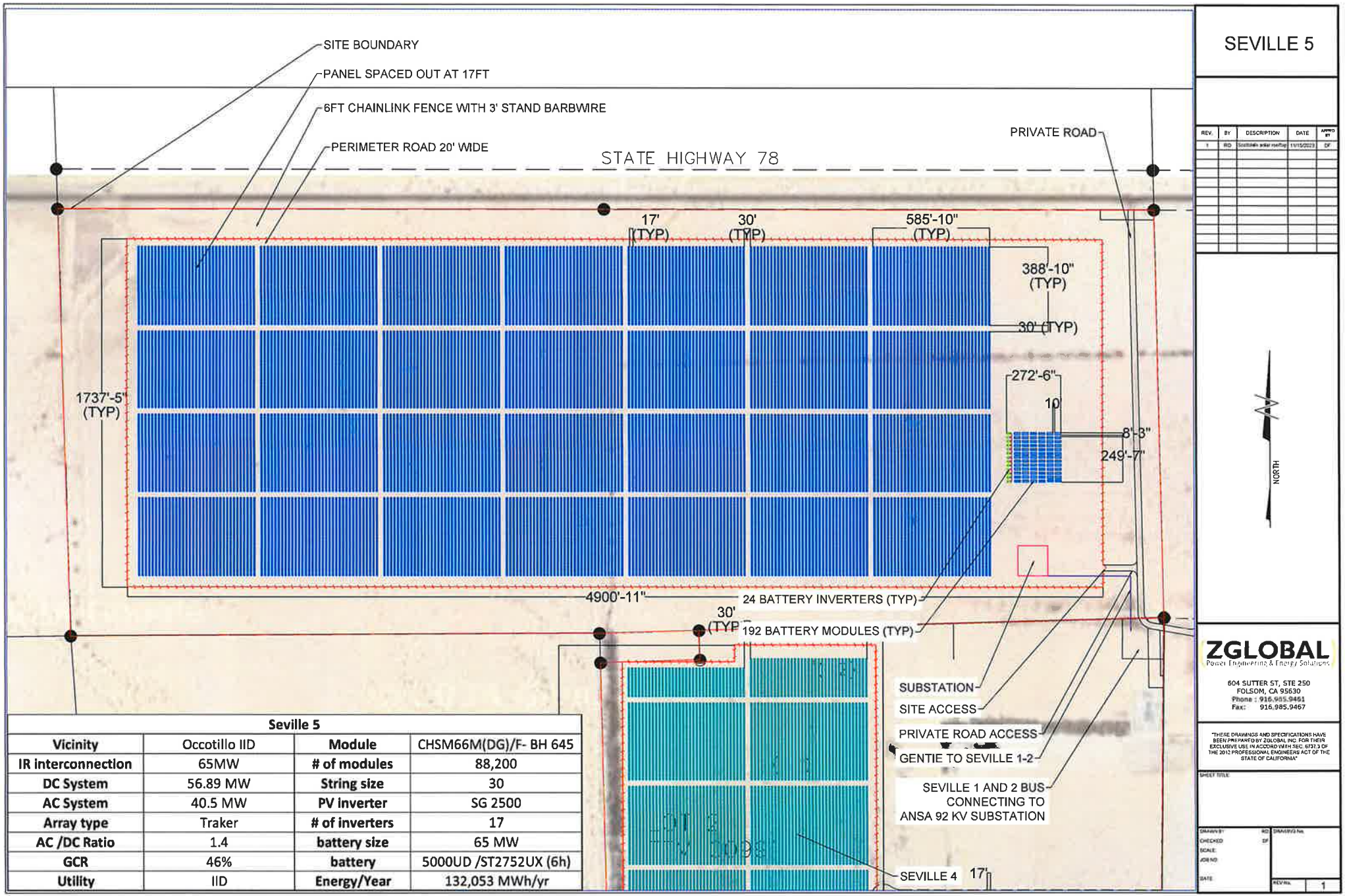
SEVILLE 5 SOLAR AND BATTERY
GPA #24-0004
ZC #24-0005
CUP #24-0013
APN 018-010-043-000

Project Location
Centerline
Parcels

N

ATTAHCMENT "B"

Site Plan



Seville 5			
Vicinity	Occotillo IID	**Module**	CHSM66M(DG)/F- BH 645
IR interconnection	65MW	**# of modules**	88,200
DC System	56.89 MW	**String size**	30
AC System	40.5 MW	**PV inverter**	SG 2500
Array type	Traker	**# of inverters**	17
AC /DC Ratio	1.4	**battery size**	65 MW
GCR	46%	**battery**	5000UD /ST2752UX (6h)
Utility	IID	**Energy/Year**	132,053 MWh/yr

SEVILLE 5

REV.	BY	DESCRIPTION	DATE	APPRO BY
1	RD	Southern solar rooftop	11/15/2023	DF

ZGLOBAL
Power Engineering & Energy Solutions
604 SUTTER ST, STE 250
FOLSOM, CA 95630
Phone : 916.985.9461
Fax: 916.985.9467

SHEET TITLE

DRAWN BY	RD	DRAWING No.	
CHECKED	DF		
SCALE			
JOB NO			
DATE		REV No.	1

ATTACHMENT "C"

Final Initial Study Packet

August 2025

Final

Initial Study

Seville 5 Solar Project SCH #2025070239

Initial Study #24-0021

General Plan Amendment #24-0004

Zone Change #24-0005

Conditional Use Permit #24-0013

Imperial County, CA

August 2025

Reviewed by:

County of Imperial

Planning & Development Services Department

801 Main Street

El Centro, CA 92243

Prepared by:

HDR Engineering, Inc.

591 Camino de la Reina, Suite 300

San Diego, CA 92108

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Introduction

A. Purpose

This document is a ☐ policy-level; ☒ project-level Initial Study for evaluation of potential environmental impacts resulting with the proposed Seville 5 Solar Project.

B. CEQA Requirements and the Imperial County's Rules and Regulations for Implementing CEQA

As defined by Section 15063 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and Section 7 of the County's Rules and Regulations for Implementing CEQA, an **Initial Study** is prepared primarily to provide the Lead Agency with information to use as the basis for determining whether an Environmental Impact Report (EIR), Negative Declaration, or Mitigated Negative Declaration would be appropriate for providing the necessary environmental documentation and clearance for any proposed project.

☐ According to Section 15065, an **EIR** is deemed appropriate for a particular proposal if the following conditions occur:

- The proposal has the potential to substantially degrade quality of the environment.
- The proposal has the potential to achieve short-term environmental goals to the disadvantage of long-term environmental goals.
- The proposal has possible environmental effects that are individually limited but cumulatively considerable.
- The proposal could cause direct or indirect adverse effects on human beings.

☐ According to Section 15070(a), a **Negative Declaration** is deemed appropriate if the proposal would not result in any significant effect on the environment.

☒ According to Section 15070(b), a **Mitigated Negative Declaration** is deemed appropriate if it is determined that though a proposal could result in a significant effect, mitigation measures are available to reduce these significant effects to insignificant levels.

This Initial Study has determined that the proposed Seville 5 Solar Project will result in potentially significant environmental impacts; however, mitigation measures are available to reduce the potentially significant impacts and therefore, a Mitigated Negative Declaration is deemed as the appropriate document to provide necessary environmental evaluations and clearance for the proposed approvals under review in this Initial Study.

This Initial Study is prepared in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970, as amended (Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et. seq.); the State CEQA Guidelines & County of Imperial's CEQA Regulations, Guidelines for the Implementation of CEQA; applicable requirements of the County of Imperial; and the regulations, requirements, and procedures of any other responsible public agency or an agency with jurisdiction by law.

Pursuant to the County of Imperial's CEQA Regulations, Guidelines for the Implementation of CEQA, depending on the project scope, the County of Imperial Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission and/or Planning Director is designated the Lead Agency, in accordance with Section 15050 of the CEQA Guidelines. The Lead Agency is the public agency which has the principal responsibility for approving the necessary environmental clearances and analyses for any project in the County.

C. Intended Uses of Initial Study

This Initial Study is an informational document which is intended to inform County of Imperial decision makers, other responsible or interested agencies, and the general public of potential environmental effects of the proposed applications. The environmental review process has been established to enable public agencies to evaluate environmental consequences and to examine and implement methods of eliminating or reducing any potentially adverse impacts. While CEQA requires that consideration be given to avoiding environmental damage, the Lead Agency and other responsible public agencies must balance adverse environmental effects against other public objectives, including economic and social goals.

The Initial Study prepared for the project will be circulated for a period of no less than 35 days for public and agency review and comments.

D. Contents of Initial Study

This Initial Study is organized to facilitate a basic understanding of the existing setting and environmental implications of the proposed applications.

SECTION 1

I. INTRODUCTION presents an introduction to the entire report. This section discusses the environmental process, scope of environmental review, and incorporation by reference documents.

SECTION 2

II. ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKLIST FORM contains the County's Environmental Checklist Form. The checklist form presents results of the environmental evaluation for the proposed Seville 4 Solar Project and those issue areas that would have either a significant impact, potentially significant impact, or no impact.

PROJECT SUMMARY, LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTINGS describes the proposed project, necessary entitlements and required applications. A description of discretionary approvals and permits required for project implementation is also included. It also identifies the location of the project and a general description of the surrounding environmental settings.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS evaluates each response provided in the environmental checklist form. Each response checked in the checklist form is discussed and supported with sufficient data and analysis as necessary. As appropriate, each response discussion describes and identifies specific impacts anticipated with project implementation.

SECTION 3

III. MANDATORY FINDINGS presents Mandatory Findings of Significance in accordance with Section 15065 of the CEQA Guidelines.

E. Scope of Environmental Analysis

For evaluation of environmental impacts, each question from the Environmental Checklist Form is summarized and responses are provided according to the analysis undertaken as part of the Initial Study. Impacts and effects will be evaluated and quantified, when appropriate. To each question, there are four possible responses, including:

1. No Impact: A "No Impact" response is adequately supported if the impact simply does not apply to the proposed project.
2. Less Than Significant Impact: The proposed project will have the potential to impact the environment. These impacts, however, will be less than significant; no additional analysis is required.
3. Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated: This applies where incorporation of mitigation measures has reduced an effect from "Potentially Significant Impact" to a "Less Than Significant Impact."
4. Potentially Significant Impact: The proposed project could have impacts that are considered significant. Additional analyses and possibly an EIR could be required to identify mitigation measures that could reduce these impacts to less than significant levels.

F. Policy-Level or Project-Level Environmental Analysis

This Initial Study will be conducted under a ☐ policy-level, ☒project-level analysis.

Regarding mitigation measures, it is not the intent of this document to "overlap" or restate conditions of approval that are commonly established for future known projects or the proposed project and associated entitlement applications. Additionally, those other standard requirements and regulations that any development must comply with, that are outside the County's jurisdiction, are also not considered mitigation measures, and therefore, will not be identified in this document.

G. Tiered Documents and Incorporation by Reference

Information, findings, and conclusions contained in this document are based on incorporation by reference of tiered documentation, which are discussed in the following section.

5. Tiered Documents

   As permitted in Section 15152(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, information and discussions from other documents can be included into this document. Tiering is defined as follows:

   "Tiering refers to using the analysis of general matters contained in a broader EIR (such as the one prepared for a general plan or policy statement) with later EIRs and negative declarations on narrower projects; incorporating by reference the general discussions from the broader EIR; and concentrating the later EIR or negative declaration solely on the issues specific to the later project."

   Tiering also allows this document to comply with Section 15152(b) of the CEQA Guidelines, which discourages redundant analyses, as follows:

   "Agencies are encouraged to tier the environmental analyses which they prepare for separate but related projects including the general plans, zoning changes, and development

projects. This approach can eliminate repetitive discussion of the same issues and focus the later EIR or negative declaration on the actual issues ripe for decision at each level of environmental review. Tiering is appropriate when the sequence of analysis is from an EIR prepared for a general plan, policy or program to an EIR or negative declaration for another plan, policy, or program of lesser scope, or to a site-specific EIR or negative declaration."

Further, Section 15152(d) of the CEQA Guidelines states:

"Where an EIR has been prepared and certified for a program, plan, policy, or ordinance consistent with the requirements of this section, any lead agency for a later project pursuant to or consistent with the program, plan, policy, or ordinance should limit the EIR or negative declaration on the later project to effects which:

(1) Were not examined as significant effects on the environment in the prior EIR; or

(2) Are susceptible to substantial reduction or avoidance by the choice of specific revisions in the project, by the imposition of conditions, or other means."

6. Incorporation by Reference

Incorporation by reference is a procedure for reducing the size of EIRs/MND and is most appropriate for including long, descriptive, or technical materials that provide general background information, but do not contribute directly to the specific analysis of the project itself. This procedure is particularly useful when an EIR or Negative Declaration relies on a broadly-drafted EIR for its evaluation of cumulative impacts of related projects (*Las Virgenes Homeowners Federation v. County of Los Angeles* [1986, 177 Ca.3d 300]). If an EIR or Negative Declaration relies on information from a supporting study that is available to the public, the EIR or Negative Declaration cannot be deemed unsupported by evidence or analysis (*San Francisco Ecology Center v. City and County of San Francisco* [1975, 48 Ca.3d 584, 595]).

When an EIR or Negative Declaration incorporates a document by reference, the incorporation must comply with Section 15150 of the CEQA Guidelines as follows:

- The incorporated document must be available to the public or be a matter of public record (CEQA Guidelines Section 15150[a]). The General Plan EIR is available, along with this document, at the County of Imperial Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243 Ph. (442) 265-1736.
- This document must be available for inspection by the public at an office of the lead agency (CEQA Guidelines Section 15150[b]). These documents are available at the County of Imperial Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243, Ph. (442) 265-1736.
- These documents must summarize the portion of the document being incorporated by reference or briefly describe information that cannot be summarized. Furthermore, these documents must describe the relationship between the incorporated information and the analysis in the tiered documents (CEQA Guidelines Section 15150[c]). As discussed above, the tiered EIRs address the entire project site and provide background and inventory information and data which apply to the project site. Incorporated information and/or data will be cited in the appropriate sections.

- These documents must include the State identification number of the incorporated documents (CEQA Guidelines Section 15150[d]). The State Clearinghouse Number for the County of Imperial General Plan EIR is SCH #93011023.

The material to be incorporated in this document will include general background information (CEQA Guidelines Section 15150[f]).

Environmental Checklist Form

1. **Project Title:** Seville 5 Solar Project
1. **Lead Agency Name and Address:** Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243
2. **Contact Person and Phone Number:** David Black, Planner IV, (442) 265-1756
3. **Project Location:** The project site is located on one privately-owned parcel (Assessor Parcel Number (APN) 018-010-043). APN 018-010-043 encompasses approximately 270 acres in unincorporated Imperial County, California (Figure 1). The project is located immediately south of State Route (SR) 78, approximately 6 miles east of the unincorporated community of Ocotillo Wells, and approximately 7 miles west of SR 86 (Figure 2). The project site is approximately 14 miles west from the southern tip of the Salton Sea and 4 miles east of the Imperial County-San Diego County Line. Local unpaved roads provide access to the project site from SR 78. Federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are located south and east of the project site (Figure 3).
4. **Project Sponsor's Name and Address:** Apex Energy Solutions, LLC, 750 W. Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243
5. **General Plan Designation:** Agriculture
6. **Zoning:** General Agriculture (A-2)
7. **Description of Project:** The proposed project consists of four primary components: 1) 65-megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic (PV) facility; 2) 130-MW battery energy storage system (BESS); 3) on-site substation; and 4) a gen-tie line to an existing substation immediately south of the project site (APN 018-170-058) with ultimate delivery to Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) existing 92-kV "K" Line. These four components are collectively referred to as the "proposed project" or "project." A detailed project description is provided in the Project Summary section below.
8. **Surrounding Land Uses and Setting: Briefly describe the project's surroundings:**

   The project site is vacant and previously disturbed by historical agricultural uses. The area surrounding the project site is predominantly flat as most of the land has been leveled to accommodate past agricultural activities and facilitate irrigation. The area to the southeast of the project site has been developed with renewable energy facilities (Seville 1 and Seville solar facilities, and Titan I Solar facility) (Figure 2). The eight parcels immediately south of the project site, identified as APNs 018-170-058, -059, -060, -061, -062, -063, -064, and -065, are also planned to be developed with renewable energy facilities.

   The project site is located in a sparsely populated portion of Imperial County. There are no established residential communities located within or in the vicinity of the project site. The nearest residence is approximately 500 west of the project site. The Ocotillo Recreational Vehicle Resort is located approximately 0.50 miles west of the project site.

   The project site is zoned General Agriculture (A-2) (Figure 3). Lands to the north and west of the project site are zoned Open Space/Preservation (S-2). Federal lands managed by the BLM

are located south and east of the project site. The Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area is immediately north of SR 78.

9. **(Other public agencies whose approval is required (e.g., permits, financing approval, or participation agreement.):**

   - California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region
   - Imperial County Air Pollution Control District
   - Imperial County Public Works Department
   - Imperial Irrigation District
   - California Department of Fish and Wildlife – Trustee Agency (Public Resources Code §21070)/Responsible Agency (Public Resources Code §21069)
   - California Department of Transportation – Encroachment Permit (if required)

10. **Have California Native American tribes traditionally and culturally affiliated with the project area requested consultation pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.3.1? If so, is there a plan for consultation that includes, for example, the determination of significance of impacts to tribal cultural resources, procedures regarding confidentiality, etc.?**

    To date, the County has received one response related to the AB 52 and SB 18 Native American consultation processes – Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians (January 31, 2025). The Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians has requested formal government consultation under AB 52 and SB 18, that a cultural resources inventory be prepared for the project, and copies of the report and record search be provided. Additionally, the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians requested the presence of an approved Cultural Resource Monitor(s) from a Consulting Tribe during any ground disturbing activities.

Environmental Factors Potentially Affected

The environmental factors checked below would be potentially affected by this project, involving at least one impact that is a "Potentially Significant Impact" as indicated by the checklist on the following pages.

☐	Aesthetics	☐	Agriculture and Forestry Resources	☐	Air Quality
☒	Biological Resources	☒	Cultural Resources	☐	Energy
☒	Geology/Soils	☐	Greenhouse Gas Emissions	☐	Hazards & Hazardous Materials
☐	Hydrology / Water Quality	☐	Land Use/Planning	☐	Mineral Resources
☐	Noise	☐	Population/Housing	☐	Public Services
☐	Recreation	☐	Transportation	☒	Tribal Cultural Resources
☐	Utilities/Service Systems	☐	Wildfire	☐	Mandatory Findings of Significance

Environmental Evaluation Committee Determination

After Review of the Initial Study, the Environmental Evaluation Committee (EEC) has:

- ☐ Found that the proposed project COULD NOT have a significant effect on the environment, and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- ☒ Found that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, there will not be a significant effect in this case because revisions in the project have been made by or agreed to by the project proponent. A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.
- ☐ Found that the proposed project MAY have a significant effect on the environment, and an ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required.
- ☐ Found that the proposed project MAY have a "potentially significant impact" or "potentially significant unless mitigated" impact on the environment, but at least one effect 1) has been adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and 2) has been addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis as described on attached sheets. An ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT is required, but it must analyze only the effects that remain to be addressed.
- ☐ Found that although the proposed project could have a significant effect on the environment, because all potentially significant effects (a) have been analyzed adequately in an earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION pursuant to applicable standards, and (b) have been avoided or mitigated pursuant to that earlier EIR or NEGATIVE DECLARATION, including revisions or mitigation measures that are imposed upon the proposed project, nothing further is required.

EEC VOTES	YES	NO	ABSENT
PUBLIC WORKS	☒	☐	☐
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH	☒	☐	☐
OFFICE EMERGENCY SERVICES	☒	☐	☐
APCD	☒	☐	☐
AG	☒	☐	☐
SHERIFF DEPARTMENT	☒	☐	☐
ICPDS	☒	☐	☐

For

Jim Minnick, Director of Planning/EEC Chairman

4/24/2025

Date:

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Project Summary

Project Location

The project site is located on one privately-owned parcel (APN 018-110-043). APN 018-010-043 encompasses approximately 270 acres in unincorporated Imperial County, California (Figure 1). The project is located immediately south of State Route (SR) 78, approximately 6 miles east of the unincorporated community of Ocotillo Wells, and approximately 7 miles west of SR 86 (Figure 2). The project site is also approximately 14 miles west from the southern tip of the Salton Sea and 4 miles east of the Imperial County-San Diego County Line. Local unpaved roads provide access to the project site from SR 78. Federal lands managed by the BLM are located south and east of the project site (Figure 3).

Renewable Energy Overlay Zone

In 2015, the County adopted the Imperial County Renewable Energy and Transmission Element, which includes an RE Zone (RE Overlay Map). This General Plan element was created as part of the California Energy Commission Renewable Energy Grant Program to amend and update the County's General Plan to facilitate future development of renewable energy projects.

The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the RE Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects with an approved conditional use permit (CUP). The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of renewable energy facilities while minimizing the impact on other established uses. CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone.

The one parcel that comprises the project site, APN 018-010-043, is outside of the County's RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the applicant is requesting a General Plan Amendment and Zone Change to include/classify APN 018-010-043 into the RE Overlay Zone. The underlying "Agriculture" General Plan designation would remain.

Environmental Setting

The project site is vacant and previously disturbed by historical agricultural uses. The area surrounding the project site is predominantly flat as most of the land has been leveled to accommodate past agricultural activities and facilitate irrigation. The area to the southeast of the project site has been developed with renewable energy facilities (Seville 1 and Seville solar facilities, and Titan I Solar facility) (Figure 2). The eight parcels immediately south of the project site, identified as 018-170-058, -059, -060, -061, -062, -063, -064, and -065, are also planned to be developed with renewable energy facilities.

The project site is located in a sparsely populated portion of Imperial County. There are no established residential communities located within or in the vicinity of the project site. The nearest residence is approximately 500 west of the project site. The Ocotillo Recreational Vehicle Resort is located approximately 0.50 miles west of the project site.

The project site is zoned General Agriculture (A-2). Lands to the north and west of the project site are zoned Open Space/Preservation (S-2). Federal lands managed by the BLM are located south and

east of the project site. The Ocotillo Wells State Vehicular Recreation Area is immediately north of SR 78.

Project Components

Apex Energy Solutions, LLC (project applicant) proposes to construct and operate the project, consisting of four primary components: 1) 65-MW PV energy generation facility; 2) 130-MW BESS; 3) on-site substation; and 4) a gen-tie line to an existing substation immediately south of the project site (APN 018-170-058) with ultimate delivery to Imperial Irrigation District's (IID) existing 92-kV "K" Line. These four components together are collectively referred to as the "proposed project" or "project." These project components are described below and depicted in Figure 4.

Solar Energy Facility

The proposed project involves the construction of a 65-MW single axis tracking PV solar energy facility.

The solar energy facility would involve solar PV technology modules mounted on horizontal single-axis tracker (HSAT) systems. The fixed-frame PV module arrays would be mounted on racks that would be supported by driven piles and arranged in arrays spaced up to 30 feet apart (pile to pile) to maximize performance and to allow access for panel cleaning. Solar modules would be a maximum of 10 feet high. These arrays would be separated from each other and the perimeter security fence by at least 20-foot-wide interior roads to provide access to all areas for maintenance and emergency vehicles.

Electricity generated by the PV modules would be collected by a direct current (DC) collection system routed underground in trenches. This DC power would be delivered to one of the pad-mounted inverters in weatherproof enclosures located within the arrays. Underground or overhead 12.5-kV or 34.5-kV collection lines would transmit the electricity to a new on-site substation, further described below.

Battery Energy Storage System

As shown in Figure 4, a 130-MW BESS is proposed within the southeast portion of the project site, adjacent to the proposed solar energy facility. The proposed BESS would consist of either lithium ion or flow batteries. The on-site BESS facility would include battery modules, inverters, and a control structure. The BESS would include approximately 192 battery packs/modules and 29 inverters.

The batteries will be housed in either storage containers or buildings fitted with heating, ventilation, and air conditioning and fire suppression systems as necessary, depending on the final selection of battery technology. Inside the housing, the batteries will be placed on racks, the orientation of which depends on the type of housing. Underground trenches with conduits will be used to connect the batteries to the control and monitoring systems, and inverters will be used to convert the PV produced DC power to AC power. Direct burial of cables would also be considered.

On-Site Substation

The proposed substation would be approximately 150 feet by 150 feet (0.5 acre) in size and would be located adjacent to the BESS in the southeast corner of the project site. The proposed substation would be unstaffed and automated. The California Building Code and the IEEE 693, Recommended Practices for Seismic Design of Substations, will be followed for the substation's design, structures, and equipment.

Gen-tie Line

As previously mentioned above, underground or overhead 12.5-kV or 34.5-kV collection lines would transmit the electricity to a new on-site substation. The proposed project includes a gen-tie line to deliver electricity from the on-site substation to an existing substation immediately south of the project site (APN 018-170-058) with ultimate delivery to IID's existing 92 kV "K" Line on the eastern border of the project site. Interconnection poles would be approximately 40 to 45 feet in height.

Security

Six-foot high security fencing and a three-foot stand of barbed wire would be installed around the perimeter of the project site at the commencement of construction and site access would be limited to authorized site workers. In addition, a video surveillance system would also be installed for security.

Site Access

Vehicular access to the project site will be from an existing unpaved private road that intersects SR 78. This road is currently used to access the existing solar facilities to the southeast (Seville 1, Seville 2 and Titan I Solar) (Figure 2). This private road would provide a direct entrance to the project site at its northeast corner and would be the primary route for construction vehicle traffic (Figure 4). During operation, PV panels would be spaced to maintain appropriate clearance to accommodate emergency access.

Fire Protection/Fire Suppression

Fire protection systems for battery systems would be designed in accordance with California Fire Code and would take into consideration the recommendations of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 855.

Fire suppression agents such as Novec 1230 or FM 2000, or water may be used as a suppressant. In addition, fire prevention methods would be implemented to reduce potential fire risk, including voltage, current, and temperature alarms. Energy storage equipment would comply with Underwriters Laboratory (UL)-95401 and test methods associated with UL-9540A. The project would include lithium-ion batteries. For lithium-ion batteries storage, a system would be used that would contain the fire event and encourage suppression through cooling, isolation, and containment. Suppressing a lithium-ion (secondary) battery is best accomplished by cooling the burning material. A gaseous fire suppressant agent (e.g., 3M™ Novec™ 1230 Fire Protection Fluid or similar) and an automatic fire extinguishing system with sound and light alarms would be used for lithium-ion batteries.

To mitigate potential hazards, redundant separate methods of failure detection would be implemented. These would include alarms from the Battery Management System (BMS), including voltage, current, and temperature alarms. Detection methods for off gas detection would be implemented, as applicable. These are in addition to other potential protective measures such as ventilation, overcurrent protection, battery controls maintaining batteries within designated parameters, temperature and humidity controls, smoke detection, and maintenance in accordance with manufacturer guidelines. Remote alarms would be installed for operations personnel as well as emergency response teams in addition to exterior hazard lighting. In addition, an Incidence Response Plan would be implemented. Additionally, the project applicant would contribute its proportionate share for purchase of any fire-suppression equipment, if determined warranted by the County Fire Department for the proposed project.

Construction

Construction of the project is anticipated to be completed over the course of 12 to 18 months in the following proposed phases:

- Site Preparation and Grading (including construction equipment delivery, graveling new access roads, grubbing, and grading necessary for construction of the racking system, inverter pads, switching station, substation and energy storage system);
- Trenching and Interconnection Construction (including the delivery of solar components, trenching for underground electrical conduit, and substation, transmission lines and installation of electrical infrastructure);
- Substation and Switching Station (installing potential foundations and the substation and switching station apparatus); and
- Solar Array Installation (including security fencing and finalization).

All construction activities, including construction staging of equipment, would be situated entirely within the project site. Typical construction equipment would be used during all phases of project construction; would be stored within the staging area; and would potentially include graders, water trucks, forklifts, bulldozers, and backhoes. Grading for solar field construction is expected to be minor because the site is fairly level. However, grading would be necessary for construction of the racking system, inverter pads, switching station, substation, and energy storage system.

Operations

The project would be operated on an unstaffed basis and be monitored remotely, with periodic on-site personnel visitations for security, maintenance and system monitoring. No full-time site personnel would be required on-site during operations. Any required planned maintenance activities would generally consist of equipment inspection and replacement and would be scheduled to avoid peak load periods. Any unplanned maintenance would be responded to as needed, depending on the event.

Water Use

Water demand for the project would consist of water needed during construction, primarily for dust control, and water needed for maintenance during operation. Construction water demand is anticipated to be approximately 112.5 acre-feet (af) over the course of 12 to 18 months. The operational and maintenance water demand is anticipated to be 7.5 af of water annually for duration of the 25-year project life. Periodic washing of the PV modules is expected to occur twice a year in order to remove dust and maintain efficient power generation. The project's water supply would be provided by groundwater from two private wells owned by the project proponent. An existing well located in the southeast corner of the parcel immediately below the project site would be used for construction needs. The second well, located in the south-central portion of the project site, would be used for operation and maintenance purposes. Figure 4 shows the location of these wells.

Decommissioning

Electricity generated by the project could be sold under the terms of a power purchase agreement (PPA) with a power purchaser (i.e., utility service provider). The projected life of the project is 25 years. At the end of the PPA term, the owner of the project may choose to enter into a subsequent PPA,

update technology and re-commission, or decommission and remove the generating facility and its components. Upon decommissioning, the site could be converted to other uses in accordance with applicable land use regulations in effect at that time. A collection and recycling program will be executed to promote recycling of project components and minimize disposal in landfills. All permits related to decommissioning would be obtained, where required.

Project decommissioning may include the following activities:

- The facility would be disconnected from the utility power grid.
- Project components would be dismantled and removed using conventional construction equipment and recycled or disposed of safely.
- PV panel support steel and support posts would be removed and recycled off-site by an approved metals recycler.
- All compacted surfaces within the project site and temporary on-site haul roads would be de-compacted.
- Electrical and electronic devices, including inverters, transformers, panels, support structures, lighting fixtures, and their protective shelters would be recycled off-site by an approved recycler.
- All concrete used for the underground distribution system would be recycled off-site by a concrete recycler or crushed on-site and used as fill material.
- Fencing would be removed and recycled off-site by an approved metals recycler.
- Soil erosion and sedimentation control measures would be re-implemented during the decommissioning period and until the site is stabilized.

Prior to issuance of the initial grading permit for the project, a Site Reclamation Plan in conformance with County of Imperial requirements would be prepared for review and approval by the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department. This plan would be implemented at the end of power operations and would describe the proposed equipment dismantling, removal and site restoration program, in conformance with County requirements.

Project Approvals

Imperial County

The following are the primary discretionary actions/approvals required for implementation of the project:

1. **General Plan Amendment (#24-0004).** An amendment to Imperial County's General Plan, Renewable Energy and Transmission Element (County of Imperial 2015) is required to implement the proposed project. CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone. The one parcel that comprises the project site, APN 018-010-043, is outside of the County's RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the applicant is requesting a General Plan Amendment to expand the overlay to include/classify APN 018-010-043 into the RE Overlay Zone. The underlying "Agriculture" General Plan designation would remain.

2. **Zone Change (#24-0005).** The applicant is requesting a zone change to include/classify APN 018-010-043 into the RE Overlay Zone (i.e. zone change from A-2 to A-2-RE).

3. **Approval of Conditional Use Permit (CUP 24-0013).** Implementation of the project would require the approval of a CUP by Imperial County to allow for the construction and operation of the proposed solar energy facility with an integrated BESS. The project parcel is currently zoned as A-2. Pursuant to Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 8, the following uses are permitted in the A-2 zone subject to approval of a CUP from Imperial County:

   j) Battery Storage Facility (must be connected to an existing electrical power generation plant such as solar, geothermal, wind, natural gas, or other renewable energy generator , as an accessory unit to said power plant) The maximum allowance of battery shall be in a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.

   pp) Major facilities relating to the generation and transmission of electrical energy, provided such facilities are not, under State or Federal law, to be approved exclusively by an agency or agencies of the State and/or Federal governments and provided that such facilities shall be approved subsequent to coordination and review with the Imperial Irrigation District for electrical matters. The maximum allowance of battery shall be in a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.

Figure 1. Regional Location

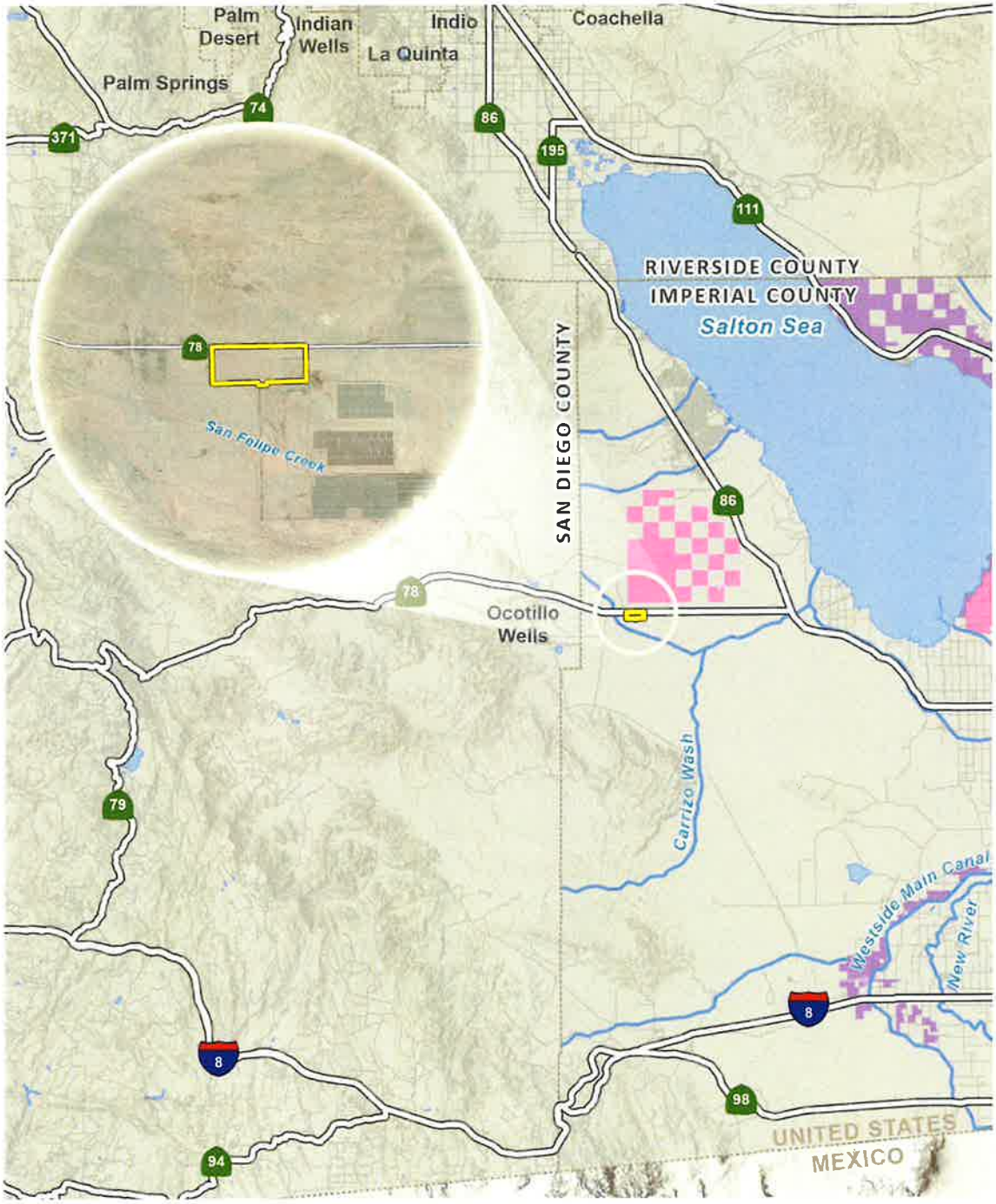


Figure 2. Local Vicinity

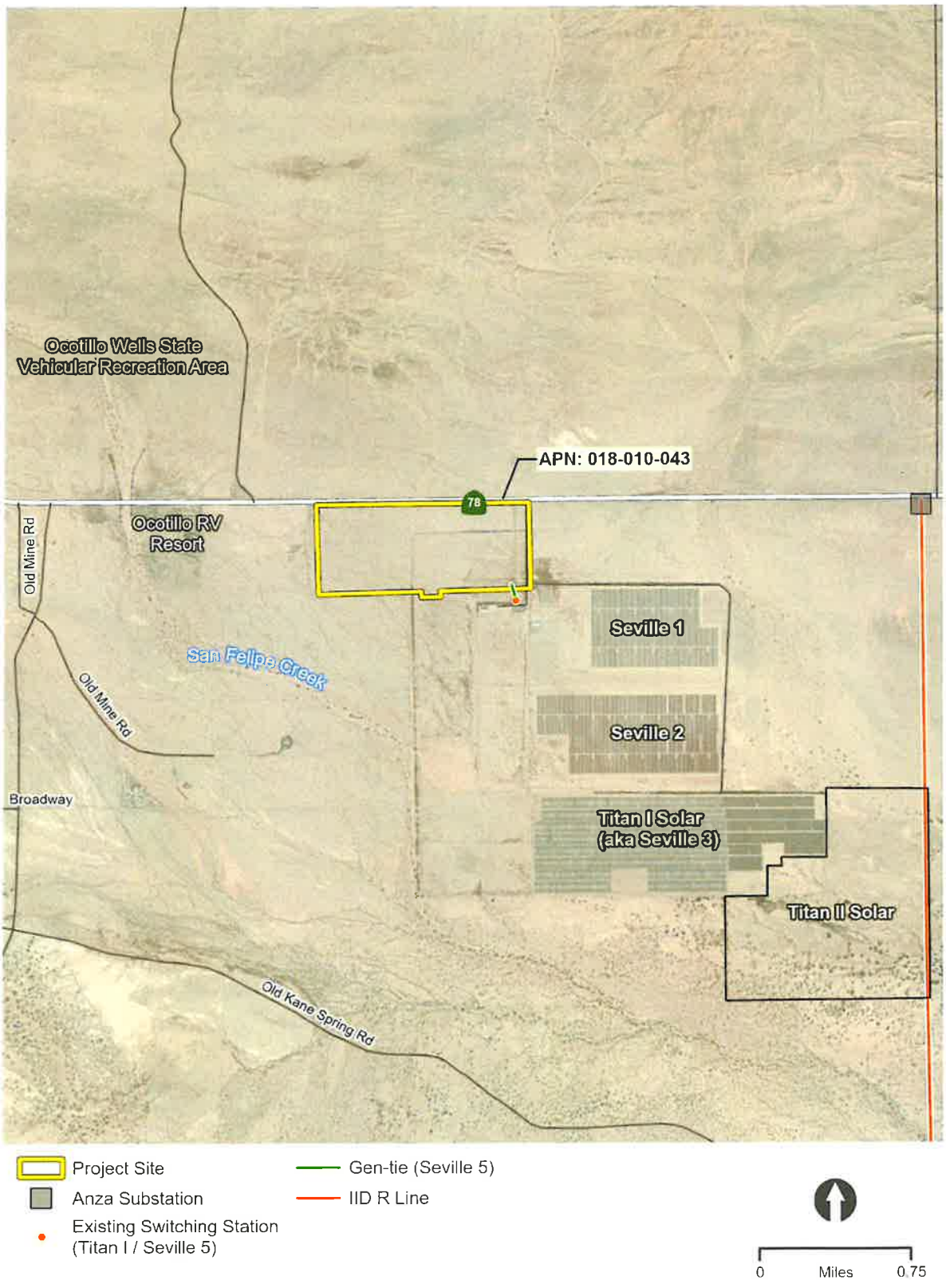


Figure 3. Project Site and Surrounding Zoning

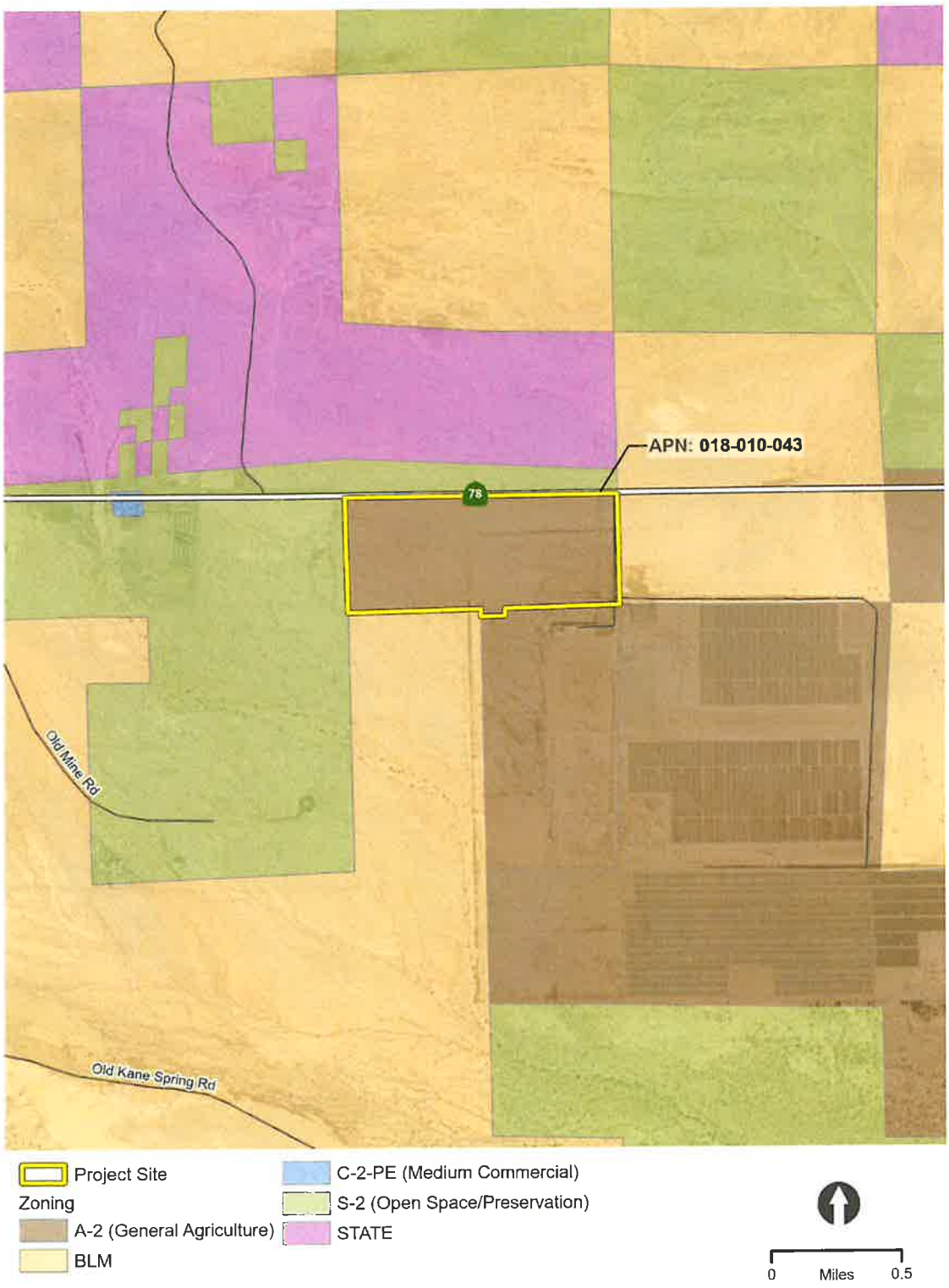
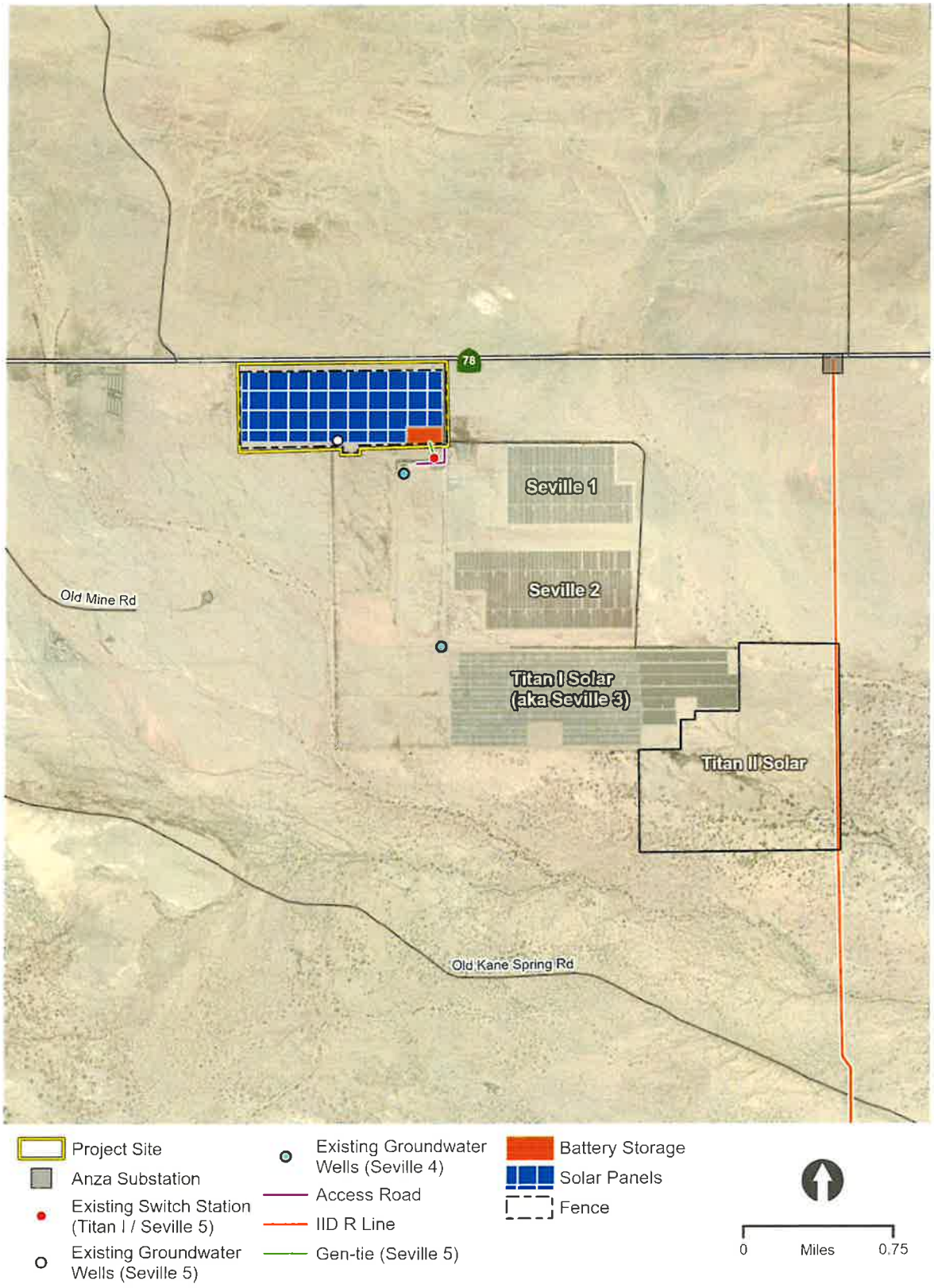


Figure 4. Proposed Site Plan



Evaluation of Environmental Impacts

1. A brief explanation is required for all answers except "No Impact" answers that are adequately supported by the information sources a lead agency cites in the parentheses following each question. A "No Impact" answer is adequately supported if the referenced information sources show that the impact simply does not apply to projects like the one involved (e.g., the project falls outside a fault rupture zone). A "No Impact" answer should be explained where it is based on project-specific factors, as well as general standards (e.g., the project will not expose sensitive receptors to pollutants, based on a project-specific screening analysis).
2. All answers must take account of the whole action involved, including off-site as well as on-site, cumulative as well as project-level, indirect as well as direct, and construction as well as operational impacts.
3. Once the lead agency has determined that a particular physical impact may occur, then the checklist answers must indicate whether the impact is potentially significant, less than significant with mitigation, or less than significant. "Potentially Significant Impact" is appropriate if there is substantial evidence that an effect may be significant. If there are one or more "Potentially Significant Impact" entries when the determination is made, an EIR is required.
4. "Negative Declaration: Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated" applies where the incorporation of mitigation measures has reduced an effect from "Potentially Significant Impact" to a "Less Than Significant Impact." The lead agency must describe the mitigation measures, and briefly explain how they reduce the effect to a less than significant level (mitigation measures from "Earlier Analyses," as described in (5) below, may be cross-referenced).
5. Earlier analyses may be used where, pursuant to the tiering, program EIR, or other CEQA process, an effect has been adequately analyzed in an earlier EIR or negative declaration. Section 15063(c)(3)(D). In this case, a brief discussion should identify the following:
    a. Earlier Analysis Used. Identify and state where they are available for review.
    b. Impacts Adequately Addressed. Identify which effects from the above checklist were within the scope of and adequately analyzed in an earlier document pursuant to applicable legal standards, and state whether such effects were addressed by mitigation measures based on the earlier analysis.
    c. Mitigation Measures. For effects that are "Less than Significant with Mitigation Measures Incorporated," describe the mitigation measures which were incorporated or refined from the earlier document and the extent to which they address site-specific conditions for the project.
6. Lead agencies are encouraged to incorporate into the checklist references to information sources for potential impacts (e.g., general plans, zoning ordinances). Reference to a previously prepared or outside document should, where appropriate, include a reference to the page or pages where the statement is substantiated.
7. Supporting Information Sources: A source list should be attached, and other sources used, or individuals contacted should be cited in the discussion.

8. This is only a suggested form, and lead agencies are free to use different formats; however, lead agencies should normally address the questions from this checklist that are relevant to a project's environmental effects in whatever format is selected.
9. The explanation of each issue should identify:
    d. The significance criteria or threshold, if any, used to evaluate each question; and
    e. The mitigation measure identified, if any, to reduce the impact to less than significance.

I Aesthetics				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Except as provided in Public Resources Code Section 21099, would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic building within a state scenic highway?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Visual Assessment and Glare Analysis for the Seville Solar Energy Project* prepared by SWCA Environmental Consultants (SWCA). This report is provided as Appendix A of this Initial Study.

a) **No Impact.** The project site is located in a rural portion of Imperial County and is not located within an area containing a designated scenic vista or any formal or informal turnouts along the highway near the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. No impact would occur.

b) **Less Than Significant Impact** According to the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) State Scenic Highway System Map, there are no designated or eligible scenic highways within or surrounding the project site (Caltrans 2019). The nearest road segment considered eligible for a State scenic highway designation is SR 78 located immediately north of the project site. The portion of SR 78 from the junction with SR 86 to the San Diego County Line is considered eligible for future scenic highway destination. This portion of road is considered scenic because of its desert characteristics and views of the nearby Salton Sea. The project site would be visible from this eligible portion of SR 78; however, there are multiple other solar projects in operation in the vicinity and the proposed project would be consistent with the visual character as discussed in Response I. c) below. Therefore, a less than significant impact would occur.

c) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project site was viewed from potential viewer group locations in the surrounding area. Representative public viewpoints were identified for further analysis, based on dominance of the project site within the view, the relationship to visual resources, duration of views, and expected sensitivity of the viewer group. Of those representative viewpoints, four key observation points (KOPs) were selected that best illustrate the visual changes that would occur as a result of the project. Because of the project's proximity to a state highway and to recreation areas, combined with the general openness of the desert landscape, the potential for public visibility of project improvements is moderately high.

General Project Visibility

Visibility from Residences

A few private residences are scattered west and southwest of the project site. Most of these residences have viewing distances to the site ranging from approximately 1 to 1.5 miles. The extent of views from these locations to the project site varies with the adjacent topography and surrounding vegetation. Existing views toward the site from these residences include the existing Titan 1, Seville 1, and Seville 2 solar facility immediately southeast of the project site.

Visibility from Transportation Corridors

The project would have the potential to be seen from an approximately 7-mile section of SR 78, generally between Old Mine Road to the west and around 3 miles east of Pole Line Road. An annual average of approximately 1,200 vehicles daily travel SR 78 adjacent to the project site (Appendix A of this Initial Study). From the more distant viewpoints along SR 78, although theoretically visible, the project site is difficult to identify within the overall landscape. From closer viewpoints along SR 78, the site becomes more distinguishable, as does the adjacent solar facilities.

Visibility from Recreational Areas

Formal recreation areas having potential views of the project site include the Ocotillo Wells State OHV Recreation Area, which occupies most of the land north of SR 78. The quality of views from the OHV recreation area to the project site varies greatly depending on distance, elevation, orientation, landform, and vegetation. Recreational users of the OHV area may be as close as 100 feet (from directly across SR 78), to several miles away from the site, where viewing distances would effectively eliminate visual perception of the project. Ocotillo RV Resort is located approximately 0.6 mile west of the project along SR 78.

Visibility from the San Juan Bautista De Anza National Historic Trail

The Juan Bautista De Anza National Historic Trail corridor passes to the southwestern portion of the project site. Although the specific trail alignment is uncertain and undeveloped in this area, official National Park Service (NPS) signage on SR 78 and the National Park Service Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail website information directs the public to this area, as part of the overall Historic Trail corridor alignment. In general, views from the Historic Trail to the project site would vary, but along some segments would be close-range to the project site and unobscured.

Key Observation Points and Contrast Analysis

Of the representative viewpoints described above, four KOPs were selected that best illustrate the visual changes that would occur as a result of the project. KOPs selected for further analysis represent visually sensitive areas that would have potential views of the project and consist of either high-use travel routes, public roadways serving nearby residential development, or public recreational facilities.

The following visual contrast analysis is a qualitative discussion of anticipated contrast between the existing landscape character and the proposed activities and/or facilities. Factors taken into consideration for such an analysis include distance of the proposed

project elements from the viewer and the level of perceived contrast between the proposed project elements and the existing landscape.

The levels of perceived contrast between the proposed project elements and the existing landscape from each KOP were classified using the following terms:

- None: The element contrast is not visible or perceived.
- Weak: The element contrast can be seen but does not attract attention.
- Moderate: The element contrast begins to attract attention and begins to dominate the characteristic landscape.
- Strong: The element contrast demands attention, would not be overlooked, and is dominant in the landscape.

KOP-1: From near the Ocotillo RV Resort and SR 78; view facing southeast.

KOP 1 represents recreational views from the Ocotillo RV Resort and the view of a passenger in a vehicle traveling on SR 78 northeast of the project site (see Appendix A of this Initial Study). The view from this KOP is characterized by broad, panoramic views of slightly undulating terrain leading to the curving and irregular low mountains in the distant background. The vegetation consists of generally rounded low to moderate course patches of light to dark khaki and light green to dark green desert shrubs consistent through the scenery. Transmission lines made of coarse dark brown, vertically standing wood poles and smaller dark fence poles with a thin wireframe continue consistently horizontally through the midground in addition to geometric residential and existing solar facility structures. The transmission pole and fence line in the foreground draw the eye and are a focus of attention from this KOP because of their prominence against the broad, panoramic landscape, pale soft sandy soil, and the pale blue sky.

The proposed project would be approximately 1.1 miles southeast of this KOP location. Based on the level viewer perspective, the close distance to the KOP, and the short duration of recreation and travel route views, the proposed project would begin to attract attention from this KOP. The project would begin to be perceivable from this viewpoint, would introduce similar form, line, color, and texture to the existing solar facility infrastructure in the immediate area, and would screen or partially screen existing quality views. Therefore, it is anticipated that there would be weak (low) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOP 1.

KOP-2: From SR-78, view facing southwest.

KOP 2 represents vehicular traffic traveling on SR 78, northeast of the project site. Views of the immediate foreground are represented by light to dark khaki and low to moderate shrubs, fine sandy soils, and bright white and yellow lane lines on an asphalt road. Transmission lines made of coarse dark brown, vertically standing wood poles connected by curved galvanized conductor wires are consistently spaced apart, and geometric residential and existing solar facility structures through the midground. In the background, views are represented by mountains to the northwest, west, and south.

The project site is approximately 0.2 mile southwest of this KOP location. Based on the level viewer perspective, close distance to the KOP, high travel speeds of the viewer, the project would be very noticeable from this KOP due to the close proximity to SR 78 and is the focus of viewer attention. Where visible, the project would introduce form, line, and color similar to existing solar facilities in the form of subdued gray to black geometric solar arrays, which would attract attention to the viewer. Therefore, it is anticipated that there would be moderate (medium) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOP 2.

KOP-3: From Pole Line Road approximately 0.35 mile north of SR 78, view facing southwest.

KOP 3 represents views from recreation users traveling along Pole Line Road, northeast of the project site. Views from this KOP are characterized by broad, panoramic views of soft, curving, and slightly undulating terrain with irregular small and large areas of light khaki to light brown and green low to high desert shrubs. Views in the immediate foreground are represented by the light tan soft sandy soils from Pole Line Road, and small, irregular desert shrubs. The consistent brown wooden vertical geometric transmission structures and the geometric smooth and continuous subdued grey to dark blue of the existing solar facilities through the midground are a focus of attention from this location because of their prominence in the broad, panoramic landscape. In the background, views are represented by rectangular residential and existing solar facility structures leading up to the rock-covered mountains to the northwest, west, and south.

The proposed project would be approximately 2.1 miles southwest of this KOP location. Based on the superior viewer perspective, the distance to the KOP, and the short duration of recreation views, the proposed project would begin to attract attention from this KOP. The project would begin to be perceivable from this viewpoint and would introduce similar form, Line, color, and texture to the existing solar facility infrastructure in the immediate area and would screen or partially screen existing quality views. Therefore, it is anticipated that there would be weak (low) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOP 3.

KOP-4: From BLM Road 191, approximately 300 feet south of SR 78, view facing southwest.

KOP 4 represents the view of a recreation user just south of SR 78 approaching the BLM open space to the south. This KOP also represents potential viewers accessing the Juan Batista de Anza National Historic Trail corridor, which passes approximately 3 miles south of this viewpoint and is identified by BLM interpretive signage along SR 78. Views from this KOP are characterized by broad, panoramic views of soft, curving, and slightly undulating terrain with irregular small and large areas of light khaki to light brown and green low to high desert shrubs. Midground and background views are represented by the light tan rocky sandy soils from Juan Batista de Anza National Historic Trail and BLM 191, and small, irregular desert shrubs. The geometric smooth and continuous subdued grey to black of the existing solar facilities through the midground are a focus of attention from this location because of their prominence in the broad, panoramic landscape. In the background, views are represented by tall, dark, consistently spaced transmission monopoles and rectangular residential and existing solar facility structures leading up to soft undulating and curving mountains to the northwest, west, and south.

The proposed project would be approximately 2 miles southwest of this KOP location. Based on the level viewer perspective, the distance to the KOP, and the short duration of recreation, the proposed project would begin to attract attention from this KOP. The project would begin to be perceivable from this viewpoint, would introduce form, line, color, and texture similar to the existing solar facility infrastructure in the immediate area, and would screen or partially screen existing quality views. Therefore, it is anticipated that there would be weak (low) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOP 4.

Impact Analysis

Short-term visual impacts would occur in association with construction activities, including introducing heavy equipment (e.g., cranes), staging and materials storage areas and potential dust and exhaust to the project area. While construction equipment and activity may present a visual nuisance, it would be temporary (approximately 12-18 months) and would not represent a permanent change in views. Therefore, impacts associated with degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the project site during construction are considered less than significant.

Project implementation would change the natural conditions of the site with development of a solar energy and battery storage facility. Onsite vegetation would be completely removed,

and the site would be graded to accommodate the installation of PV module frames in arrays. Although project implementation would result in the conversion of a naturally vegetated area with energy-related facilities, open space vegetated areas are not considered to be scenic resources by the County of Imperial.

As described in the contrast analysis above for the 4 KOPs, it is anticipated that there would be weak (low) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOPs 1, 3, and 4 and a moderate (medium) perceived visual contrast created by the project within the existing landscape from KOP 2. Furthermore, the addition of solar panels and new electrical lines and poles associated with the proposed gen-tie line would be absorbed into the broader landscape that already includes existing solar facilities and transmission lines. Based on these considerations, impacts associated with degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the project site during operation are considered less than significant.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not include any substantial source of nighttime light in the vicinity of the project site. Any lighting required for safety and security within the project site would be hooded and oriented downward to avoid spilling over to adjacent parcels consistent with Title 9, Division 17, Chapter 2: Specific Standards for all Renewable Energy Projects, of the County's Zoning Ordinance.

A glare analysis was conducted to determine the potential for significant glint or glare from solar panels and other built-project components that may affect residents, motorists, or airborne travelers.

The analysis for the proposed project used the GlareGauge (also known as Solar Glare and Flux Analysis Tool) model developed by Forge Solar and the U.S. Department of Energy's Sandia National Laboratories to evaluate potential glare. The analysis focused on potential glare impacts on observation points and linear travel routes (refer to Figure 6 of the *Visual Assessment and Glare Analysis for the Seville Solar Energy Project* [Appendix A of this Initial Study]). Aircraft landing and approach were considered at three airports: Ocotillo Wells Airport, Salton Sea Airport, and Borrego Air Ranch Airport. The proposed project site is approximately 5.7 miles southeast of the county-owned and publicly used Ocotillo Wells Airport, approximately 8.5 miles southwest of the privately owned and publicly used Salton Sea Airport, and approximately 14.7 miles southeast of the private Borrego Air Ranch Airport.

The glare analysis for the proposed project determined that the site would have zero minutes of potential glint or glare at all airports and route receptors. The project has the possibility to create low-potential afterimage (green ocular impact) and potential afterimage (yellow ocular impact) glare at one observation point along SR 78. The route receptor will have potential for glare up to 968 minutes per year of green ocular impact and 4,404 minutes per year of yellow ocular impact. The glare would occur from the end of October to the middle of February from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. for approximately 80 minutes per day.

The Ocotillo Wells Airport – North Northwest Runway is likely to experience low-potential afterimage for 172 minutes per year. The glare would occur from the beginning to end of January and the middle of November to the middle of December from 6:15 a.m. to 7:15 a.m. for approximately 5 minutes per day.

II Agriculture and Forestry Resources				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
In determining whether impacts to agricultural resources are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to the California Agricultural Land Evaluation and Site Assessment Model (1997) prepared by the California Department of Conservation as an optional model to use in assessing impacts on agriculture and farmland. In determining whether impacts to forest resources, including timberland, are significant environmental effects, lead agencies may refer to information compiled by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection regarding the state's inventory of forest land, including the Forest and Range Assessment Project and the Forest Legacy Assessment project; and forest carbon measurement methodology provided in Forest Protocols adopted by the California Air Resources Board. Would the project:				
a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act contract?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code section 51104(g))?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** According to the California Department of Conservation's (DOC) California Important Farmland Finder, the project site is not located on land designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (DOC 2020). The project site is designated as Other Land by the DOC. Therefore, the proposed project would not convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance to non-agricultural use and no impact is identified.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project site is currently zoned as A-2 (General Agriculture). Pursuant to Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 8, the following uses are permitted in the A-2 zone subject to approval of a CUP from Imperial County:

j) Battery Storage Facility (must be connected to an existing electrical power generation plant such as solar, geothermal, wind, natural gas, or other renewable energy generator, as an accessory unit to said power plant). The maximum allowance of battery shall be in the ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.

pp) Major facilities relating to the generation and transmission of electrical energy, provided such facilities are not, under State or Federal law, to be approved exclusively by an agency or agencies of the State and/or Federal governments and provided that such facilities shall be approved subsequent to coordination and review with the Imperial Irrigation District for electrical matters. The maximum allowance of battery shall be in a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.

Upon approval of a CUP, the project's uses would be consistent with the Imperial County Land Use Ordinance. Additionally, operation of the proposed project is not expected to inhibit or adversely affect adjacent agricultural operations through the placement of sensitive land uses or generation of excessive dust or shading. Based on these considerations, impacts are considered to be less than significant.

As of December 31, 2018, all Williamson Act contracts in Imperial County have been terminated. The project site is not located on Williamson Act contracted land. Therefore, the proposed project would not conflict with a Williamson Act contract and no impact is identified.

b) **No Impact.** The project site is not located on forest land as defined in PRC Section 1220 (g). There are no existing forest lands, timberlands, or timberland zoned Timberland Production either on-site or in the immediate vicinity; therefore, the project would not conflict with existing zoning of forest land or cause rezoning of any forest land. Additionally, the site is not zoned as forest, timberland or for Timberland Production. Therefore, no impact would occur.

c) **No Impact.** There are no existing forest lands either on site or in the immediate vicinity of the project site. The proposed project would not result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use. Therefore, no impact would occur.

d) **No Impact.** As discussed in Response II. a) above, the project site is not located on land designated as Important Farmland and would not convert farmland to non-agriculture use. As discussed in Response II. d) above, there are no existing forest lands either on site or in the immediate vicinity of the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in the conversion of forest land to non-forest use. Therefore, no impact would occur.

III Air Quality				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Where available, the significance criteria established by the applicable air quality management district or air pollution control district may be relied upon to make the following determinations. Would the project:				
a) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Result in a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the project region is non-attainment under an applicable federal or state ambient air quality standard?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Expose sensitive receptors to substantial pollutant concentrations?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Result in other emissions (such as those leading to odors adversely affecting a substantial number of people?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project* prepared by SWCA. This report is provided as Appendix B of this Initial Study.

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The proposed project is located within the jurisdiction of the Imperial County Air Pollution Control (ICAPCD) in the Salton Sea Air Basin. The project region is designated as a nonattainment area for the federal and state O_3 and maintenance for state PM_{10} standards. The project region is considered an "attainment/unclassified" area for all other pollutants.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, under the provisions of the Clean Air Act, requires each state with regions that have not attained the federal air quality standards to prepare a State Implementation Plan (SIP), detailing how these standards are to be met in each local area.

The region's SIP is constituted of the ICAPCD air quality plans: 2018 PM_{10} SIP, 2018 Annual $PM_{2.5}$ SIP, 2017 8-Hour Ozone SIP, 2013 24-Hour $PM_{2.5}$ SIP, 2009 1997 8-Hour Ozone Reasonably Available Control Technology SIP, 2009 PM_{10} SIP, and the 2008 Ozone Early Progress Plan. Conformance with the Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP) for development projects is determined by demonstrating compliance with local land use plans and/or population projections, meeting the land use designation set forth in the local general Plan, and comparing assumed emissions in the AQMP to proposed emissions. The project must demonstrate compliance with all ICAPCD applicable rules and regulations, as well as local land use plans and population projections.

Although the project would contribute to energy supply, which is one factor of population growth, the project would not significantly increase employment, population, or growth within

the region. The project does not include residential development or large local or regional employment centers, and thus would not result in significant population or employment growth. Furthermore, the operation of the project would create renewable energy over its planned lifetime, helping California meet its Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), and decrease the need for energy from fossil fuel-based power plants in the state, which is considered a beneficial impact to statewide air quality. The energy produced by the project would displace the criteria pollutant emissions that would otherwise be produced by existing, business-as-usual power generation resources (including natural gas and coal).

The thresholds of significance, adopted by the ICAPCD, determine compliance with the goals of attainment plans in the region. As such, emissions below the ICAPCD regional mass daily emissions thresholds would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plans. The following provides an analysis of potential impacts during construction of the project followed by an analysis of potential impacts during operation of the project

Construction

Air quality impacts related to construction were calculated using CalEEMod Version 2022.1.1.17 air quality model. The construction module in CalEEMod is used to calculate the emissions associated with the construction of the project. The project's construction assumptions used in the CalEEMod, including the construction schedule and equipment mix, are described in the project's air quality analysis (Appendix B of this Initial Study).

By default, CalEEMod assumes the percentage of paved and unpaved roads for each district as provided by the district. For Imperial County, the default assumption is 50 percent paved and 50 percent unpaved. However, this is not characteristic of the roads in the vicinity of the project site. Construction vehicles would access the site via SR 78, which is paved. Therefore, worker, vendor, and haul trucks to the project site are assumed to travel on roads that are 98 percent paved. Construction emissions were mitigated in the CalEEMod model to comply with any ICAPCD fugitive dust control rules or client-committed mitigation measures. In CalEEMod, the following mitigation measures were included to reflect these fugitive dust controls: reduce speed on unpaved roads to 15 miles per hour, water exposed areas two times per day, and water the unpaved roads traveled to the project a minimum of two times per day.

The ICAPCD requires that, regardless of the size of a project, all feasible standard measures for fugitive PM_{10} must be implemented at construction sites. Additionally, all feasible discretionary measures for PM_{10} apply to those construction sites that are 5 acres or more for non-residential developments or 10 acres or more in size for residential developments. Standard and discretionary measures from the ICAPCD handbook include:

Standard Measures for Fugitive PM_{10} Control:

a. All disturbed areas, including bulk material storage which is not being actively utilized, shall be effectively stabilized and visible emissions shall be limited to no greater than 20 percent opacity for dust emissions by using water, chemical stabilizers, dust suppressants, tarps or other suitable material such as vegetative ground cover.

b. All on-site and off-site unpaved roads will be effectively stabilized, and visible emissions shall be limited to no greater than 20 percent opacity for dust emissions by paving, chemical stabilizers, dust suppressants and/or watering.

c. All unpaved traffic areas one acre or more with 75 or more average vehicle trips per day will be effectively stabilized and visible emission shall be limited to no greater than 20 percent opacity for dust emissions by paving, chemical stabilizers, dust suppressants and/or watering. The transport of bulk materials shall be completely covered unless six inches of freeboard space from the top of the container is maintained with no spillage and loss of bulk material. In addition, the cargo

compartment of all haul trucks is to be cleaned and/or washed at delivery site after removal of bulk material.

d. The transport of bulk materials shall be completely covered unless six inches of freeboard space from the top of the container is maintained with no spillage and loss of bulk material. In addition, the cargo compartment of all haul trucks is to be cleaned and/or washed at delivery site after removal of bulk material.

e. All track-out or carry-out will be cleaned at the end of each workday or immediately when mud or dirt extends a cumulative distance of 50 linear feet or more onto a paved road within an urban area.

f. Movement of bulk material handling or transfer shall be stabilized prior to handling or at points of transfer with application of sufficient water, chemical stabilizers or by sheltering or enclosing the operation and transfer line.

g. The construction of any new unpaved road is prohibited within any area with a population of 500 or more unless the road meets the definition of a temporary unpaved road. Any temporary unpaved road shall be effectively stabilized and visible emissions shall be limited to no greater than 20 percent opacity for dust emission by paving, chemical stabilizers, dust suppressants and/or watering.

Discretionary Measures for Fugitive PM_{10} Control

a. Water exposed soil with adequate frequency for continued moist soil.

b. Replace ground cover in disturbed areas as quickly as possible.

c. Automatic sprinkler system installed on all soil piles.

d. Vehicle speed for all construction vehicles shall not exceed 15 mph on any unpaved surface at the construction site.

e. Develop a trip reduction plan to achieve a 1.5 average vehicle ridership for construction employees.

f. Implement a shuttle service to and from retail services and food establishments during lunch hours.

The ICAPCD requires that, regardless of the size of a project, all feasible standard measures for construction equipment must be implemented at construction sites. Standard measures from the ICAPCD handbook include:

Standard Mitigation Measures for Exhaust Equipment Emissions Control

a. Use of alternative fueled or catalyst equipped diesel construction equipment, including all off-road and portable diesel-powered equipment.

b. Minimize idling time either by shutting equipment off when not in use or reducing the time of idling to 5 minutes as a maximum.

c. Limit, to the extent feasible, the hours of operation of heavy-duty equipment and/or the amount of equipment in use.

d. Replace fossil fueled equipment with electrically driven equivalents (provided they are not run via a portable generator set).

Construction-related Emissions. Construction-related activities are temporary, short-term sources of air pollutant emissions. Sources of construction-related emissions include:

- Fugitive dust from grading activities;
- Exhaust emissions from construction equipment;
- Application of chemical coatings (paints, stains, sealants, etc.); and

- Exhaust and fugitive dust emissions from on-road vehicles (trips by workers, delivery trucks, and material-hauling trucks).

The estimated unmitigated emissions from construction of the project site are summarized in Table 1. The detailed assumptions and calculations, as well as CalEEMod outputs are provided in Appendix B of this Initial Study.

Table 1. Unmitigated Construction Emissions Summary

Construction Year	Unmitigated Construction Emissions Summary					
	ROG	NOx	CO	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	SO_2
Pollutant Emission (pounds per day)						
2024 Peak daily emission	3.44	28.07	34.73	65.34	9.46	0.07
2025 Peak daily emission	2.43	19.48	34.72	56.67	5.86	0.06
ICAPCD significance thresholds	75	100	550	150	N/A	N/A
Threshold exceeded?	No	No	No	No	N/A	N/A

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

As shown in Table 1, estimated unmitigated construction emissions for all pollutants are below ICAPCD significance thresholds. The application of mitigation measures which comply with the standard mitigation measures for fugitive dust control regarding on- and off-site unpaved roads and all unpaved traffic areas 1 acre or more with 75 or more average vehicle trips per day being effectively stabilized, and visible emissions limited to no greater than 20 percent opacity for dust emissions by paving, chemical stabilizers, dust suppressants and/or watering. In CalEEMod, the following mitigation measures were included to reflect these standard mitigation measures for fugitive dust control: reduce speed on unpaved roads to 15 miles per hour, water exposed areas two times per day, and water the unpaved roads traveled to the project a minimum of two times per day. The estimated mitigated emissions from construction of the project are summarized below in Table 2. The combined construction emissions from all components of the project are below the recommended ICAPCD thresholds of significance. Therefore, project construction would have a less than significant impact.

Table 2. Mitigated Construction Emissions Summary

Construction Year	Unmitigated Construction Emissions Summary					
	ROG	NOx	CO	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	SO_2
Pollutant Emission (pounds per day)						
2024 Peak daily emission	3.44	28.07	34.73	56.75	6.93	0.07
2025 Peak daily emission	2.43	19.48	34.72	53.37	5.53	0.06
ICAPCD significance thresholds	75	100	550	150	N/A	N/A
Threshold exceeded?	No	No	No	No	N/A	N/A

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

Operation

The project's operation is limited to panel washing and maintenance, which is not anticipated but is conservatively assumed to be up to 16 one-way employee vehicle trips per weekday. Project operations would generate VOC, NOx, CO, SOx, PM_{10}, and $PM_{2.5}$ emissions from mobile sources and water use. The estimated emissions from operation of the project are summarized below in Table 3. As shown in Table 3, the proposed project would not exceed ICAPCD thresholds during operations. As such, operations-related emissions would be less than significant for the proposed project.

Table 3. Unmitigated Operational Emissions Summary

Operation Year 2025	Unmitigated Operational Emissions Summary					
	ROG	NOx	CO	PM_{10}	$PM_{2.5}$	SO_2
Pollutant Emission (pounds per day)						
Mobile	0.02	0.62	0.29	5.90	0.63	0.009
Area	0	0	0	0	0	0
Energy	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	**0.02**	**0.62**	**0.29**	**5.90**	**0.63**	**0.009**
ICAPCD significance thresholds	137	137	550	150	550	150
Threshold exceeded?	No	No	No	No	No	No

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

Decommissioning

Solar equipment has a lifespan of approximately 20 to 25 years. At the end of the project's operational term, the project applicant may determine that the project site should be decommissioned and deconstructed, or it may seek an extension of its CUP. The emissions associated with decommissioning of the project are not quantitatively estimated, as the extent of activities and emissions factors for equipment and vehicles at the time of decommissioning are unknown. The overall activity would be anticipated to be somewhat less than project construction, and the emissions from off- and on-road equipment are expected to be much lower than those for the project construction. However, without changes in fugitive dust control methods, it is likely that fugitive dust emissions would be closer to those estimated for construction. Overall, similar to construction, emissions associated with decommissioning would be less than significant.

Conclusion

As described above, conformance with the AQMP for development projects is determined by demonstrating compliance with local land use plans and/or population projections and comparing assumed emissions in the AQMP to proposed emissions. Because the proposed project complies with local land use plans and population projections and would not exceed ICAPCD's thresholds during construction and operations, the proposed project would not conflict with or obstruct implementation of the applicable air quality plan. This is considered a less than significant impact.

b) **Less than Significant Impact**. By its very nature, air pollution is largely a cumulative impact. ~~No single project is sufficient in size, by itself, to result in nonattainment of ambient air quality standards. Instead, a~~ A project's individual emissions contribute to existing cumulatively significant adverse air quality impacts. The ICAPCD's thresholds of significance represent the allowable emissions a project can generate without generating a cumulatively considerable contribution to regional air quality impacts. Therefore, a project that would not exceed the ICAPCD thresholds of significance on a project level also would not be considered to result in a cumulatively considerable contribution to these regional air quality impacts.

As discussed above in Response III. a) emissions generated during project construction and operations would not exceed the ICAPCD's thresholds of significance. Therefore, project construction and operations would not result in a cumulatively considerable net increase in emissions of ozone, PM_{10}, or $PM_{2.5}$, and impacts would be considered less than significant.

c) **Less than Significant Impact.** Sensitive receptor locations typically include residential areas, hospitals, elder-care facilities, rehabilitation centers, daycare centers, and parks. The project site is in a rural area surrounded by a few private residencies scattered west and

southwest of the project site. The nearest residence is approximately 500 west of the project site.

Diesel Particulate Matter

Construction-related activities that would result in temporary, intermittent emissions of diesel PM would be from the exhaust of off-road equipment and on-road, heavy-duty trucks. On-road, diesel-powered haul trucks traveling to and from the construction area to deliver materials and equipment are less of a concern because they do not operate at any one location for extended periods of time such that they would expose a single receptor to excessive diesel PM emissions.

Based on the construction-related emissions modeling conducted (see Appendix B of this Initial Study), maximum daily emissions of exhaust PM_{10} (used as a surrogate for diesel PM) would be less than 1.5 pounds during peak construction. A portion of these emissions would be related to haul trucks traveling to and from the project site. In addition, studies show that diesel PM is highly dispersive and that concentrations of diesel PM decline with distance from the source (e.g., 500 feet from a freeway, the concentration of diesel PM decreases by 70 percent) (Appendix B of this Initial Study). Additionally, the closest receptor to the project site is located approximately 500 feet west of the project site, with the next closest residence more than 1,500 feet from the project site. Construction would not be limited to only one portion of the project site but would rather occur throughout the project site in phases. Construction-related TAC emissions would not expose sensitive receptors to an incremental increase in cancer risks greater than 10 in 1 million or a hazard index greater than 1.0 because the low exposure level reflects the 1) relatively low mass of diesel PM emissions that would be generated by construction activity on the project site (i.e., less than 1.5 pound (lb)/day of exhaust PM_{10}), 2) the relatively short duration of diesel PM-emitting construction activity at the project site (12-18 months), and 3) the highly dispersive properties of diesel PM. Therefore, a less than significant impact would occur.

Operation-related TAC emissions would be negligible, and the project would be remotely controlled, with very few visits to the site for maintenance. Also, any on-road, diesel-powered haul trucks traveling to and from the construction area to deliver materials and equipment are less of a concern because they do not operate at any one location for extended periods of time such that they would expose a single receptor to excessive diesel PM emissions. No other TAC emission sources would occur during operations. Therefore, operation-generated emissions of TACs would be less than significant.

Fugitive Dust

During construction and operation-related activities, the project would implement dust control measures, including an operational dust control plan, to ensure receptors in the project vicinity would not be impacted by the project's dust emissions during operations. Therefore, a less than significant impact would occur.

Naturally Occurring Asbestos

Airborne asbestos is classified as a known human carcinogen and was identified by as a TAC by CARB in 1986. The project is not located in a geological setting with a potential to host asbestos and, therefore asbestos will not be an issue for this project (Appendix B of this Initial Study). No impact related to asbestos would occur.

Carbon Monoxide Hot Spots

A CO hot spot is an area of localized CO pollution that is caused by severe vehicle congestion on major roadways, typically near intersections. CO hot spots have the potential to violate state and federal CO standards at intersections, even if the broader basin is in attainment for federal and state levels.

A CO hot spot would occur if an exceedance of the state 1-hour standard of 20 parts per million (ppm) or the 8-hour standard of 9 ppm were to occur. The analysis prepared for CO

attainment in the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) 1992 Federal Attainment Plan for Carbon Monoxide in Los Angeles County and a Modeling and Attainment Demonstration prepared by the SCAQMD as part of the 2003 AQMP can be used to demonstrate the potential for CO exceedances of these standards. The SCAQMD is the air pollution control officer for much of southern California. The SCAQMD conducted a CO hot spot analysis as part of the 1992 CO Federal Attainment Plan at four busy intersections in Los Angeles County during the peak morning and afternoon time periods. The intersections evaluated included Long Beach Boulevard and Imperial Highway (Lynwood), Wilshire Boulevard and Veteran Avenue (Westwood), Sunset Boulevard and Highland Avenue (Hollywood), and La Cienega Boulevard and Century Boulevard (Inglewood). The busiest intersection evaluated was at Wilshire Boulevard and Veteran Avenue, which has a traffic volume of approximately 100,000 vehicles per day. Despite this level of traffic, the CO analysis concluded that there was no violation of CO standards (Appendix B of this Initial Study). In order to establish a more accurate record of baseline CO concentrations affecting Los Angeles, a CO "hot spot" analysis was conducted in 2003 at the same four busy intersections in Los Angeles at the peak morning and afternoon time periods. This "hot spot" analysis did not predict any violation of CO standards. The highest 1-hour concentration was measured at 4.6 ppm at Wilshire Boulevard and Veteran Avenue and the highest 8-hour concentration was measured at 8.4 ppm at Long Beach Boulevard and Imperial Highway. Thus, there was no violation of CO standards (Appendix B of this Initial Study).

Similar considerations are employed by other air districts when evaluating potential CO concentration impacts. More specifically, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the air pollution control officer for the San Francisco Bay Area, concludes that under existing and future vehicle emission rates, a given project would have to increase traffic volumes at a single intersection by more than 44,000 vehicles per hour or 24,000 vehicles per hour where vertical and/or horizontal air does not mix in order to generate a significant CO impact (Appendix B of this Initial Study).

Project operations are anticipated to result in only two washing events per year, with up to 24 one-way trips per day. It is noted that this is a conservative estimate, and many days will have no operational related vehicle trips. Thus, the project would not generate traffic volumes at any intersection of more than 100,000 vehicles per day (or 44,000 vehicles per day), and there is no likelihood of the project traffic exceeding CO values.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project would not be a source of any odors during operations. During construction, a limited number of diesel engines would be operated on the project site for limited durations. Diesel exhaust and VOCs from diesel engines would be emitted during construction of the project. However, construction activities would have a short duration lasting approximately 12 to 18 months, and emissions would disperse quickly from the project site.

Land uses commonly considered to be potential sources of obnoxious odorous emissions include agriculture (farming and livestock), wastewater treatment plants, food processing plants, chemical plants, composting facilities, refineries, landfills, dairies, and fiberglass molding. The project does not include any uses associated with odors.

Based on these considerations, construction and operation of the project would not create emissions or odors adversely affecting a substantial number of people. A less than significant impact would occur.

IV Biological Resources				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Have a substantial adverse effect, either directly or through habitat modifications, on any species identified as a candidate, sensitive, or special status species in local or regional plans, policies, or regulations, or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☒	☐	☐
b) Have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community identified in local or regional plans, policies, and regulations or by the California Department of Fish and Game or U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c) Have a substantial adverse effect on state or federally protected wetlands (including, but not limited to, marsh, vernal pool, coastal, etc.) through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means?	☐	☒	☐	☐
d) Interfere substantially with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife species or with established native resident or migratory wildlife corridors, or impede the use of wildlife nursery sites?	☐	☐	☒	☐
e) Conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources, such as a tree preservation policy or ordinance?	☐	☒	☐	☐
f) Conflict with the provisions of an adopted Habitat Conservation Plan, Natural Community Conservation Plan, or other approved local, regional, or state habitat conservation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Biological Resources Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project and Aquatic Resources Delineation Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project* prepared by SWCA. These reports are provided as Appendix C and Appendix D of this Initial Study, respectively.

a) **Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated.** SWCA biologists conducted a general biological survey of the project site in May 2023. Prior to conducting field surveys, SWCA also conducted a search of existing biological data for the project site, including a review of biological databases for sensitive plant and animal species reported within one mile of the project site, and a review of the site's physical characteristics (e.g., location, elevation, soils/substrate, topography). The desktop analysis was updated in February 2025. Databases included the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDB) and the All-Species Occurrences Database (U).

Existing Conditions

Vegetation Communities

Five vegetation communities and land cover types were identified within the project site:

- Fourwing Saltbush Scrub (*Atriplex canescens* Shrubland Alliance),
- Creosote Bush Scrub (*Larrea tridentata* Shrubland Alliance),
- Tamarisk Thickets (*Tamarix* spp. Shrubland Semi-Natural Alliance),
- Disturbed – Fallow Agriculture, and
- Developed

Plants

Based on an evaluation of local occurrence records, habitat conditions, elevation, and the results of the habitat assessment and plant survey, it was determined that 15 special-status plants species have the potential to occur in the project site. These 15 species include:

- Salton milk-vetch (*Astragalus crotalariae*)
- Harwood's milk-vetch (*Astragalus insularis* var. *harwoodii*)
- Borrego milk-vetch (*Astragalus lentiginosus* var. *borreganus*)
- gravel milk-vetch (*Astragalus sabulonum*)
- Peirson's pincushion (*Chaenactis carphoclinia* var. *peirsonii*)
- California ditaxis (*Ditaxis serrata* var. *californica*)
- Abrams' spurge (*Euphorbia abramsiana*)
- Newberry's velvet-mallow (*Horsfordia newberryi*)
- ribbed cryptantha (*Johnstonella costata*)
- winged cryptantha (*Johnstonella holoptera*)
- Torrey's box-thorn (*Lycium torreyi*)
- brown turbans (*Malperia tenuis*)
- Thurber's pilostyles (*Pilostyles thurberi*)
- desert unicorn-plant (*Proboscidea althaeifolia*), and
- Orcutt's woody-aster (*Xylorhiza orcuttii*)

Table 4 provides the special-status ranking, range or habitat requirements, and potential to occur in the project site for each of the 15 species listed above. None of the 15 special-status plants species that have the potential to occur in the project site were observed during surveys.

Wildlife

Based on the assessment of local occurrence records, habitat conditions, and environmental requirements, nine species have the potential to occur within the project site. These species include:

- Flat-tailed Horned Lizard (*Phrynosoma mcallii*)
- Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*)
- Burrowing Owl (*Athene cunicularia*)
- Mountain Plover (*Charadrius montanus*)
- Loggerhead Shrike (*Lanius ludovicianus*)
- LeConte's thrasher (*Toxostoma lecontei*)
- Palm Springs Pocket Mouse (*Perognathus longimembris bangsi*)
- American Badger (*Taxidea taxus*), and
- Desert Kit Fox (*Vulpes macrotis arsipus*)

Table 5 provides the special-status ranking, range or habitat requirements, and potential to occur in the project site for each of the nine species listed above. ~~None~~ Two of the nine special-status wildlife species that have the potential to occur in the project site were observed during surveys.

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Table 4. Special-Status Plant Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area
Salton milk-vetch Astragalus crotalariae	CRPR 4.3	This perennial herb is found in gravelly or sandy soils within Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation range: 60 meters below mean sea level (bmsl) to 250 meters above mean sea level (amsl). Blooming Period: January-April.	Occurs. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 3 miles east of the project site. Suitable habitat is located within the project site, and this species was documented on-site.
Harwood's milk-vetch Astragalus insularis var. harwoodii	CRPR 2B.2	This annual herb is found in gravelly or sandy soils within Mojavean desert scrub and desert dunes. Elevation: 0-710 meters amsl. Blooming Period: January-May.	Moderate. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 5 miles south of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site.
Gravel milk-vetch Astragalus sabulonum	CRPR 2B.2	This annual/perennial herb is found predominantly in sandy soils, occasionally in gravely soils in desert dunes, Mojavean desert scrub, or Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 60 meters bmsl to 930 meters amsl. Blooming Period: February-June.	Moderate. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 3.3 miles southeast of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site.
Peirson's pincushion Chaenactis carphoclinia var. peirsonii	CRPR 1B.3, BLM_S	This annual herb is found in sandy soils within Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 3-500 meters amsl. Blooming Period: March-April.	Moderate. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 0.6 mile west of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially present within the project site.
California ditaxis Ditaxis serrata var. californica	CRPR 3.2	This perennial herb is found in Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 30-1,000 meters amsl. Blooming Period: March-December.	Low. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 6.1 miles southwest of the project site. Marginally suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site.
Abrams' spurge Euphorbia abramsiana	CRPR 2B.3	This annual herb is found in sandy soils in Sonoran and Mojavean desert scrub. Elevation Range: 5 meters bmsl to 1,310 meters amsl. Blooming Period: September to November.	High. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 0.8 mile east and west of the project site. Suitable habitat is present within the project site.

Table 4. Special-Status Plant Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area
Newberry's velvet-mallow Horsfordia newberryi	CRPR 4.3	This perennial shrub is found in rocky soils in Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 3-800 meters amsl. Blooming Period: February to December.	Low. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 6 miles southwest of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site.
Ribbed cryptantha Johnstonella costata	CRPR 4.3	This annual herb is found in sandy soils desert dunes, Mojavean desert scrub, and Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 60 meters bmsl to 500 meters amsl. Blooming Period: February to May.	High. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 0.2 mile north of the project site. Suitable habitat is present within the project site.
Winged cryptantha Johnstonella holoptera	CRPR 4.3	This annual herb is found in sandy soils and desert dunes, Mojavean desert scrub, and Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 100-1,690 meters amsl. Blooming Period: March to April.	Low. The project site falls outside the known elevation range of this species. The nearest record is approximately 7.4 miles southwest of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site.
Torrey's box-thorn Lycium torreyi	CRPR 4.2	This perennial shrub is found in rocky, sandy, streambanks, washes in Sonoran and Mojavean desert scrub. Elevation Range: 50 meters bmsl to 1,200 meters amsl. Blooming Period: (January-February) March-June (September-November).	Low. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 9 miles east of the project site. Suitable habitat is potentially located within the project site. No box thorn species were detected on-site.
Brown turbans Malperia tenuis	CRPR 2B.3	This annual herb is found in rocky slopes and sandy soils in Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 15-335 meters amsl. Blooming Period: March-April.	Low. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 5.8 miles southwest of the project site. Suitable habitat is not likely to occur within the project site.
Thurber's pilostyles Pilostyles thurberi	CRPR 4.3	This perennial herb (parasitic) is found in Sonoran desert scrub. Parasite on indigo bush species (Psorothamnus spp.) especially Emory's indigo bush (P. emoryi). Elevation Range: 0-365 meters amsl. Blooming Period: December-April.	High. The project site occurs within the known range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 1.5 miles east of the project site. Suitable habitat is present within the project site. Emory's indigo bush was detected on-site.

Table 4. Special-Status Plant Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area
Desert unicorn-plant Proboscidea althaeifolia	CRPR 4.3	This perennial herb is found on gently sloping sandy flats and washes, sometimes on roadsides, in Sonoran desert scrub. Elevation Range: 85-1,000 meters amsl. Blooming Period: May-September.	Low. The project site falls outside the known elevation range of this species and the nearest record is approximately 8.2 miles west of the project site. Suitable habitat is not likely to occur within the project site.
Orcutt's woody-aster Xylorhiza orcuttii	CRPR 1B.2, BLM_S	This perennial herb is found in arid canyons, barren slopes in creosote-bush scrub. Elevation Range: 0-365 meters amsl. Blooming Period: March-April.	Low. The project site occurs within the known range of this species, and the nearest record is approximately 8.8 miles west of the project site. Suitable habitat is not likely to occur within the project site.

Source: Appendix C of this Initial Study

Notes:

*Status Codes:

Federal Status:

BLM_S = BLM Sensitive

California Rare Plant Ranking:

1B = Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California and elsewhere

2B = Plants rare, threatened, or endangered in California, but more common elsewhere

3 = Plants about which more information is needed

4 = Plants with a limited distribution, watch list

0.1 = Seriously threatened in California

0.2 = Moderately threatened in California

0.3 = Not very threatened in California

Table 5. Special-Status Wildlife Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area
Flat-tailed horned lizard *Phrynosoma mcallii*	SSC BLM_S	Restricted to desert washes and desert flats in central Riverside, eastern San Diego, and Imperial Counties. Critical habitat element is fine sand, into which lizards burrow to avoid temperature extremes; requires vegetative cover and ants. Associated with desert dunes, and Mojavean and Sonoran desert scrub.	**Present.** Suitable habitat is present within the project area. The project area is within the known range of this species. There are multiple recent CNDDB occurrences on-site and this species was observed during the survey.
Golden eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*	FP BGEPA BLM_S	Nests in a wide variety of habitats from near sea level to 3,630 feet amsl. Nesting habitat includes tundra, shrublands, grasslands, woodland-brushlands, and coniferous forests. Nesting habitat is often associated with either cliffs or trees, although some nests are built on the ground.	**Low (foraging only).** Suitable foraging habitat occurs within the project area; however, the project area is unlikely to support nesting habitat. The project area occurs within the known range of this species. Nearest CNDDB occurrence from 1972 is approximately 13 miles west of the project sire. The nearest eBird record from 2020 is approximately 2.5 miles northwest of the project site.
Burrowing owl *Athene cunicularia*	SSC BLM_S	Open, dry annual or perennial grasslands, deserts, and scrublands characterized by low-growing vegetation. Subterranean nester, dependent upon burrowing mammals, most notabl, the California ground squirrel (*Spermophilus beecheyi*).	**Low.** Suitable habitat is present within the project site. The nearest CNDDB record from 2010 is 6 miles west of the project site. Nearest eBird record from 2015 is approximately 2 miles northwest of the project area, with multiple recent records within 5 miles of the project site.
Mountain plover *Charadrius montanus*	SSC BLM_S	Short grasslands, freshly plowed fields, newly sprouting grain fields, and sometimes sod farms. Short vegetation, bare ground, and flat topography. Prefers grazed areas and areas with burrowing rodents.	**Low (overwintering only).** Suitable habitat is present within the project area. Nearest CNDDB occurrence from 2009 is approximately 10 miles northeast of the project area. There are multiple recent eBird records 20 miles east of the project.
Loggerhead shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*	SSC	Broken woodlands, savannah, pinyon-juniper, Joshua tree, and riparian woodlands, desert oases, scrub and washes. Prefers open country for hunting, with perches for scanning, and fairly dense shrubs and brush for nesting.	**Present.** Suitable habitat is present within the Project site. The nearest CNDDB record from 2010 is 6 miles west of the project site. There are multiple recent eBird records within 5 miles of the project, and this species was observed during the survey.

Table 5. Special-Status Wildlife Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area
LeConte's thrasher *Toxostoma lecontei*	SSC, BLM_S	Desert resident; primarily of open desert wash, desert scrub, alkali desert scrub, and desert succulent scrub habitats.	**Low.** Suitable habitat is present within the project site. The nearest CNDDB record from 1933 is 6 miles east of the project site, although there are multiple more recent sightings within 10 miles. There are multiple recent eBird records within approximately 5 miles of the project site.
Palm Springs pocket mouse *Perognathus longimembris bangsi*	SSC BLM_S	Desert riparian, desert scrub, desert wash and sagebrush habitats. Most common in creosote bush–dominated desert scrub. Rarely found on rocky sites. Occurs in all canopy coverage classes.	**Low.** Suitable habitat is present within the Project area. The project is within the known range of this species. The nearest CNDDB occurrence from 2015 is approximately 9 miles northwest of the project area.
American badger *Taxidea taxus*	SSC	Badgers are generally associated with dry, open, treeless regions, prairies and grasslands, low-intensity agriculture (e.g., pasture, dryland crops), drier open scrublands and forest, parklands, and cold desert areas.	**Low.** Suitable habitat is present within the project site. There are no CNDDB occurrences near the project site. However, there are multiple recent iNaturalist observations within 5 miles of the project.
Desert kit fox *Vulpes macrotis arsipus*	CPF	Occurs in a wide range of desert habitats consisting of desert scrub and washes, and may also occur in grasslands or ruderal habitats.	**Present.** Desert kit fox is not tracked in CNDDB. However, the species is widespread throughout the Colorado Desert and expected to be present in the project vicinity. One dig site, several collapsed complexes, and old scat was found in the project site.

Source: Appendix C of this Initial Study

Notes:

*Status Codes:

Federal Status:

FE = Federally Listed Endangered

FT = Federally Listed Threatened

FC = Federal Candidate for Listing

BGEPA = Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act

BLM_S = BLM Sensitive

California State Status:

SE = California State-Listed Endangered

Table 5. Special-Status Wildlife Species with a Potential to Occur in the Project Area

Common Name *Scientific Name*	Status	Range or Habitat Requirements	Potential to Occur in the Project Area

ST = California State-Listed Threatened
FP = CDFW Fully Protected
SSC = CDFW Species of Special Concern
CPF = California Protected Fur-Bearer

PROJECT IMPACTS

Special-Status Plants

The results of the habitat assessment and rare plant survey determined that 15 special-status plant species were determined to occur or have the potential to occur in the project area. These species include Salton milk-vetch, Harwood's milk-vetch, Borrego milk-vetch, gravel milk-vetch, Peirson's pincushion, California ditaxis, Abrams' spurge, Newberry's velvet-mallow, ribbed cryptantha, winged cryptantha, Torrey's box-thorn, brown turbans, Thurber's pilostyles, desert unicorn-plant, and Orcutt's woody-aster.

None of the 15 special-status plants species that have the potential to occur in the project site were observed during surveys. The survey was conducted during the appropriate blooming season for most species; however, most annuals in the project site had already seeded at the time of the survey. Additionally, some species including, Abrams' spurge, bloom after summer monsoon storms and would not have been identifiable during the survey. Annual plant growth varies from year to year, depending on precipitation and other factors. Sensitive plant species could be found in subsequent years if weather conditions are ideal.

Potential direct impacts to special-status plants in the project area include vegetation removal or crushing of plants, which could result in the loss of individuals or populations. Special-status plants may also be subject to short-term indirect impacts, such as excessive fugitive dust, which can settle on plants, restricting light penetration and photosynthesis. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-5 would reduce potential impacts on special-status plant species to a level less than significant.

Special-Status Wildlife

Based on the assessment of local occurrence records, habitat conditions, and environmental requirements, eight species have the potential to occur within the project site. These species include: Flat-tailed Horned Lizard, Golden Eagle, Burrowing Owl, Mountain Plover, Loggerhead Shrike, LeConte's thrasher, Palm Springs Pocket Mouse, American Badger, and Desert Kit Fox. Direct impacts to these species that could occur include injury, mortality, nest or maternity colony failures, and loss of young. Indirect impacts include loss of nesting, roosting, and foraging habitat, and increase in anthropogenic effects (i.e., noise levels, introduction of invasive/nonnative species, increase in human activity, increase in dust). Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-4, and BIO-6 through BIO-24 would reduce potential impacts on special-status wildlife species to a level less than significant.

The project site has suitable nesting habitat for several special-status species and common bird species. The trees on-site provide suitable nesting habitat for raptors and other tree-nesting species. Direct impacts to nesting avian species include injury, mortality, loss of young, and nest failure. Indirect impacts include loss of foraging and nesting habitat for passerine and raptors species, increase in noise and human activities, and potential introduction of invasive/nonnative species. Impacts to nesting avian species could be considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-4, BIO-6, BIO-9, BIO-23 and BIO-24 would reduce potential impacts on nesting avian species to a level less than significant.

Mitigation Measures:

BIO-1 **Rare Plant Surveys.** Prior to initiating ground disturbance, three rare plant botanical field surveys shall be conducted that are floristic in nature (i.e., identifying all plant species to the taxonomic level necessary to determine rarity), and inclusive of areas proposed for disturbance and indirectly impacts by the project. The surveys shall be conducted by a qualified botanist or qualified biologist in accordance with the USFWS Guidelines for Conducting and Reporting Botanical Inventories for Federally Listed, Proposed, and Candidate Plants (USFWS 1996); the CDFW Protocols for Surveying and

Evaluating Impacts to Special Status Native Plant Populations and Sensitive Natural Communities (CDFW 2018); and the CNPS Botanical Survey Guidelines (CNPS 2001). If any special-status species are observed during the botanical field surveys, the project shall be designed to reduce impacts to these species through the establishment of buffers, to the extent feasible.

Buffer distances will be determined by the qualified botanist or biologist, typically 50 feet or greater from an identified special-status plant species, unless the qualified botanist or biologist determines a reduced buffer would suffice to avoid impacts to the species. All special-status plant species identified on site shall be mapped with a submeter GPS device and depicted on a site-specific aerial photograph and topographic map and included on any construction, grading, fuel modification, or other pertinent plans. If avoidance of special-status plant species is not feasible, a Special-Status Plant Relocation Plan shall be developed and implemented. The Special-Status Plant Relocation Plan shall address mitigation for special-status plants, including topsoil salvage to preserve seed bank and management of salvaged topsoil; seed collection, storage, possible nursery propagation, and planting; salvage and planting of bulbs as feasible; location of on-site receptor sites; land protection instruments for receptor areas; and funding mechanisms. The Special-Status Plant Relocation Plan shall include methods, monitoring, reporting, success criteria, adaptive management, and contingencies for achieving success.

The project proponent shall mitigate the loss of the plant(s) through the purchase of mitigation credits from a CDFW-approved bank or land acquisition and conservation at a minimum 2:1 (replacement to impact) ratio for occupied habitat should success criteria not be met, or presence of the specific is assumed based on suitable habitat acreage within the project area. Note that a higher ratio may be warranted if the proposed mitigation lands are located far away from the project site.

BIO-2 **Worker Environmental Awareness Program.** Prior to project construction, a Worker Environmental Awareness Program shall be developed and implemented by a qualified biologist and shall be available in both English and Spanish. Handouts summarizing potential impacts on special-status biological resources and the potential penalties for impacts on these resources shall be provided to all construction personnel. At a minimum, the education program shall include the following:

- the purpose for resource protection;
- a description of special-status species including representative photographs and general ecology;
- occurrences of USACE, RWQCB, and CDFW regulated features in the project study area;
- regulatory framework for biological resource protection and consequences if violated;
- sensitivity of the species to human activities;
- avoidance and minimization measures designed to reduce the impacts on special-status biological resources;
- environmentally responsible construction practices;

- reporting requirements;
- the protocol to resolve conflicts that may arise at any time during the construction process; and
- workers sign acknowledgement form indicating that the Environmental Awareness Training and Education Program that has been completed, which shall be kept on record.

BIO-3 **Project Biologist.** The project proponent shall designate a project Biologist, approved by CDFW, who shall be responsible for overseeing compliance with protective measures for biological resources during vegetation clearing and work activities within and adjacent to areas of native habitat. The project Biologist shall be familiar with the local habitats, plants, and wildlife, and have experience performing all necessary surveys and monitoring for biological resources present on site. The project Biologist shall also maintain communications with the Contractor to ensure that issues relating to biological resources are appropriately and lawfully managed and shall monitor construction. The project Biologist shall monitor all ground disturbing activities within construction areas, including activities during nesting bird season (generally February 1 to September 15), such as vegetation removal, the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs), and installation of security fencing to protect native species. The project Biologist shall have the authority to halt all work if special status species are found on site during project activities. The project Biologist shall ensure that all wildlife and regulatory agency permit requirements, conservation measures, and general avoidance and minimization measures are properly implemented and followed.

BIO-4 **Project Site Delineation.** The boundaries of all areas to be newly disturbed (including solar facility areas, staging areas, access roads, and sites for temporary placement of construction materials and spoils) shall be delineated with stakes and flagging prior to disturbance. All disturbances, vehicles, and equipment shall be confined to the flagged areas. Stockpiling of material shall only be allowed within established work areas.

BIO-5 **Invasive Plants.** The Contractor shall actively manage the spread of invasive and nonnative plants noxious weeds by implementing weed control activities, including, but not limited to, cleaning equipment and inspecting equipment prior to transport to the sites and cleaning of tires and underside of equipment prior to leaving the site, vacuuming and cleaning the interior of vehicles and heavy equipment that have been used off-site before bringing them to the project site, clean by pressure washing, washing in hot water, freezing, or bleaching personal gear and clothing, including footwear, that have been worn offsite before bringing them to the project site, and not transporting soil or other fill material from off-site locations to the project area unless they are certified weed free. The introduction of exotic, nonnative, weed, and/or invasive plant species will be avoided and controlled wherever possible, and may be achieved through physical or chemical removal and prevention, limiting the size of any vegetation and/or ground disturbance to the absolute minimum, and limiting ingress and egress to defined routes. Preventing exotic plants from entering the site via vehicular sources will include measures such as cleaning vehicles coming into and going from the site. Any use of herbicide for chemical removal of invasive and nonnative plants shall only use herbicides containing a harmless dye and registered with the California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR). All herbicides shall be applied in accordance with regulations set by the DPR. All herbicides

shall be used according to label instructions. Labeled instructions of the herbicide used shall be made available to CDFW upon request. No herbicide application when winds are greater than five (5) miles per hour.

BIO-6 **Burrowing Owl Avoidance and Minimization, and Mitigation.** Four breeding season surveys for burrowing owl shall be completed prior to project construction by a qualified avian biologist. Surveys shall be conducted as detailed within Appendix D of the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (California Department of Fish and Game [CDFG] 2012). This survey shall include 100 percent coverage of the project site. A report summarizing the breeding season surveys including all requirement for survey reports shall be submitted to CDFW for review and approval. ~~If burrowing owl or sign thereof is not detected, no further action is necessary.~~

~~If burrowing owl, active burrowing owl burrows, or sign thereof are found, the qualified avian biologist shall prepare and implement a plan for avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures to be reviewed and approved by CDFW prior to commencing project activities. The plan shall propose mitigation for permanent impacts to nesting, loss of foraging habitat, occupied and satellite burrows and/or burrowing owl habitat such that the habitat acreage, number of burrows and burrowing owls impacted are replaced with permanent conservation of similar vegetation communities to provide for burrowing owl nesting, foraging, wintering, and dispersal comparable to or better than that of the impact area. The mitigation land shall be sufficiently large acreage with presence of fossorial mammals. The mitigation lands may require habitat enhancements including enhancement or expansion of burrows for breeding, shelter, and dispersal opportunity, and remove or control of population stressors. Permanent protection of mitigation land shall be through a conservation easement deeded to a nonprofit conservation organization or public agency with a conservation mission. The project proponent shall develop and implement a mitigation land management plan to address long-term ecological sustainability and maintenance of the site for burrowing owls, and funding for the maintenance and management of mitigation land through the establishment of a long-term funding mechanism such as an endowment. If deemed appropriate by CDFW, conservation species credits may also be purchased at a CDFW-approved conservation bank.~~

~~To ensure that the project avoids impacts to burrowing owl, a qualified avian biologist shall complete a take avoidance survey no less than 14 days prior to initiating ground disturbing activities using the recommended methods described in the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG, 2012). Burrowing owls may recolonize a site after only a few days. Time lapses between project activities trigger subsequent take avoidance surveys including but not limited to a final survey conducted within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance. is identified during the non-breeding season (September 1 through January 31), then a 5O-meter buffer will be established by the biological monitor. Construction within the buffer will be avoided until a qualified biologist determines that burrowing owl is no longer present or until a CDFW-approved exclusion plan has been implemented. The buffer distance may be reduced if noise attenuation buffers such as hay bales are placed between the occupied burrow and construction activities.~~

~~If burrowing owl is identified during the breeding season (February 1 through August 31), then an appropriate buffer will be established by the biological monitor in accordance with the Staff Report on Burrowing Owl Mitigation (CDFG 2012). Construction within the buffer will be avoided until a qualified~~

~~biologist determines that burrowing owl is no longer present or until young have fledged. The buffer distance may be reduced in consultation with CDFW if noise attenuation buffers such as hay bales are placed between the occupied burrow and construction activities.~~

If complete avoidance cannot be achieved, an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) for burrowing owl shall be obtained prior to initiation of ground disturbing activities. The project proponent shall adhere to measures and conditions set forth within the ITP. Compensatory mitigation for directs impacts shall be fulfilled through conservation of suitable burrowing owl habitat. Permanent protection of mitigation land shall be established through a conservation easement deeded to a nonprofit conservation organization or public agency with a conservation mission, and include development and implementation of a mitigation land management plan to address long-term ecological sustainability and maintenance of the site for burrowing owls, and funding for the maintenance and management of mitigation land through the establishment of a long-term funding mechanism such as an endowment.

BIO-6.1: If present, the project proponent shall prepare a Burrowing Owl Plan that shall be submitted to CDFW for review and approval at least 30 days prior to initiation of ground disturbing activities. The Burrowing Owl Plan shall include 1) provide details of the number and location of occupied burrow sites, and acres of burrowing owl habitat; 2) if avoidance of impacts is proposed, details on avoidance actions and monitoring such as proposed buffers, visual barriers and other actions; 3) site monitoring to be conducted prior to, during, and after any ground disturbance sufficient to ensure take is avoided, daily monitoring with cameras and direct observation; 4) information shall be provided regarding adjacent or nearby suitable habitat available to owls. The project proponent shall implement the Burrowing Owl Plan following CDFW review and approval.

BIO-6.2: Burrowing Owl Avoidance. If burrowing owls are detected on-site, a Designated Biologist, knowledgeable of burrowing owl habitat and behavior, shall establish a no-disturbance buffer following the 2012 Staff Report around all burrowing owl burrows such as roosting and satellite burrows within the project area and an appropriate buffer determined by the Designated Biologist, with posted signs demarking the area to avoid, using stakes, flags, and/or rope or cord to minimize the disturbance of burrowing owl habitat. The Designated Biologist shall delineate burrows with different materials than those used to delineate the project area. The project proponent shall remove and properly dispose of all materials used for delineation immediately upon completion of the project.

BIO-6.3: To ensure that the project avoids impacts to burrowing owl, a qualified biologist shall complete a take avoidance survey no less than 14 days prior to initiating ground disturbance activities using the recommended methods described in the 2012 Staff Report. Burrowing owls may re-colonize a site after only a few days. Time lapses or a break in construction activities of 3 days will trigger subsequent avoidance surveys including but not limited to a final survey conducted within 24 hours prior to ground disturbance.

BIO-6.4: During take avoidance surveys, the project proponent shall have a Designated Biologist(s), pre-approved by CDFW, inspect all burrows that exhibit typical characteristics of owl activity prior to any site-preparation activities. Evidence of owl activity may include presence of owl themselves, burrows, and owl sign at burrow entrances such as pellets, whitewash or other "ornamentation", feathers prey remains, etc. If it is evident that burrows

are actively being used, the project proponent shall follow the guidelines in the CDFW approved Burrowing Owl Plan. If no Plan has been approved, the project proponent shall not commence activities until owls have been confirmed absent, as determined in consultation with CDFW, and the burrows are no longer in use by adult or juvenile owls or until a Burrowing Owl Plan has been submitted and approved.

BIO-7 **Flat-Tailed Horned Lizard.** Following standard mitigation measures listed in the Flat-tailed Horned Lizard Rangewide Management Strategy, ~~A~~ A qualified biologist shall conduct a pre-construction survey for flat-tailed horned lizard within seven days before the start of ground disturbing construction activities. The pre-construction survey will cover all suitable areas on site and focus on areas with suitable habitat for the species and where individuals were previously found. The pre-construction survey may be conducted in phases based on the construction schedule as ground-disturbing activities may occur during different phases of construction. Individual flat-tailed horned lizards found will be relocated to suitable habitat at least 200 feet from impact areas, roads, and laydown or staging areas. Translocation may only be conducted by a qualified biologist who holds a current CDFW Scientific Collection Permit that authorizes handling of this species.

The project work areas will be clearly flagged or marked at the outer boundaries to define the limit of work activities. All work activities will be restricted to the flagged areas to avoid impacts to flat-tailed horned lizard and their habitat.

A qualified biological monitor, approved by CDFW, shall be present during ground-disturbing activities. The biological monitor will examine areas of active surface disturbance periodically (at least hourly when surface temperatures exceed 85°F) for the presence of flat-tailed horned lizards. In addition, open trenches, holes, or other excavated areas will be examined at least twice per day, and immediately prior to backfilling. If avoidance is not feasible or a flat-tailed horned lizard becomes trapped within the work area, the biological monitor, who will hold a Scientific Collecting Permit for this species, may capture the lizard by hand and relocate it ~~to suitable habitat~~ outside of the impact area in the shade of a large shrub a short distance from the construction zone and in the direction of undisturbed habitat when surface temperatures range from 90 degrees F and 104 degrees F. If surface temperatures in the sun are less than 86 degrees F or exceed 122 degrees F, the qualified biological monitor shall hold the flat-tailed horned lizard in an appropriate clean, dry container (cloth bag or empty cooler) for later release when surface temperatures are in the acceptable range. Dead or injured flat-tailed horned lizards will be reported to CDFW and the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department.

BIO-8 **Desert Kit Fox and American Badger:** Prior to the beginning of surface disturbance, the project Biologist shall conduct a pre-project 10-meter transect survey (or reduced based on topography and vegetation), to attain 100% visual coverage within the project area and a minimum 200-meter buffer to determine the presence or absence of desert kit fox and/or American badger individuals, dens, and sign. If potential dens are located, they shall be monitored by the project Biologist. Trail cameras may be used to assist with observation but shall not be the sole basis upon which the status is determined. All desert kit fox dens identified as potentially active or active within the project footprint (solar site and transmission line work sites) will be monitored for a minimum of 3 consecutive nights. Surveys shall

monitor for tracks in loose dirt at den entrances or using a tracking medium (e.g., diatomaceous earth) and infra-red cameras at the den entrance(s). Using both methods (monitoring tracks and cameras) will help to ascertain whether desert kit fox in photos are actively using den sites. The project proponent shall provide the results of the survey to CDFW prior to start of project activities. The project proponent shall provide a determination if active dens can be avoided and buffered from project activities to prevent take and disturbance with the survey results. Should active dens be present within the project area that cannot be avoided with an adequate buffer, the project proponent shall reschedule project activities or submit a monitoring and passive relocation plan for CDFW's review and approval. No disturbance or passive relocation of active dens may take place during the breeding season or when juveniles are dependent on parental care. Burros that have been confirmed inactive within the project site, that are not being excavated and filled, will be blocked with rocks and sticks to discourage use during project activities and removed when construction is complete. The project Biologist shall periodically check that the inactive burrows remain blocked and are not reoccupied.

BIO-9 **Pre-Construction Survey for Special-Status Species:** A pre-construction survey shall be conducted for special-status wildlife species within all areas of potential permanent and temporary disturbance. The pre-construction survey shall take place no more than 14 days prior to the start of ground-disturbing activities. The pre-construction surveys shall take place regardless of breeding season timing and shall focus on identifying the presence of special-status wildlife species present within the Survey Area or that were identified as having a high/moderate potential to occur on the site. Should any special status species be identified during the pre-construction survey, consultation to develop suitable avoidance and minimization measures with the appropriate agency (USFWS, CDFW) may need to be undertaken.

BIO-10 **Wildlife Entrapment Avoidance.** No potential wildlife entrapments (e.g., trenches, bores) shall be left uncovered overnight. Any uncovered pitfalls will be excavated to 3:1 slopes at the ends to provide wildlife escape ramps. Alternatively, man-made ramps may be installed. Covered pitfalls will be covered completely to prevent access by small mammals or reptiles.

To avoid wildlife entrapment (including birds), all pipes or other construction materials or supplies shall be covered or capped in storage or laydown areas, and at the end of each construction workday in construction, quarrying and processing/handling areas. No pipes or tubing of sizes or inside diameters ranging from 1 to 10 inches shall be left open either temporarily or permanently.

Wildlife friendly fencing shall be utilized for the site perimeter fencing. The fencing shall be designed to allow for the passage of wildlife, with gaps of approximately 4-6 inches at the bottom and knuckled edges to create a smooth surface.

BIO-11 **Rodenticide.** No anticoagulant rodenticides, such as Warfarin and related compounds (indandiones and hydroxycoumarins), shall be used within the project site, on off-site project facilities and activities, or in support of any other project activities.

BIO-12 **Trash Abatement.** All trash and food-related waste shall be placed in self-closing, secure, wildlife-proof containers to prevent wildlife access and

removed regularly, at a minimum once a week, from the site to prevent overflow. Workers shall not feed wildlife.

BIO-13 **Project Site Speed Limit.** To minimize the likelihood for vehicle strikes on wildlife, speed limits shall not exceed 15 miles per hour when driving on access roads during daytime construction activities. Should any nighttime construction activity occur, speed limits shall not exceed 10 miles per hour when driving on access roads. All vehicles required for O&M must remain on designated access/maintenance roads.

BIO-14 **Artificial Lighting.** Avoid nighttime construction lighting or if nighttime construction cannot be avoided, use shielded directional lighting pointed downward and towards the interior of the project sites, thereby avoiding illumination of adjacent natural areas and the night sky.

BIO-15 **Equipment Mufflers.** All construction equipment used for the projects shall be equipped with properly operating and maintained mufflers.

BIO-16 **Hazardous Substances.** Hazardous materials and equipment stored overnight, including small amounts of fuel to refuel hand-held equipment, shall be stored within secondary containment when within 50 feet of open water or resources subject to Fish and Game Code section 1602 to the fullest extent practicable. Secondary containment shall consist of a ring of sandbags around each piece of stored equipment/structure. A plastic tarp/visqueen lining with no seams shall be placed under the equipment and over the edges of the sandbags, or a plastic hazardous materials secondary containment unit shall be utilized by the Contractor. The Contractor will be required to conduct vehicle refueling in upland areas where fuel cannot enter waters of the U.S. or areas subject to Fish and Game Code section 1602, and in areas that do not have potential to support federally threatened or endangered species. Any fuel containers, repair materials, including creosote-treated wood, and/or stockpiled material that is left on site overnight, shall be secured in secondary containment within the work area and staging/assembly area and covered with plastic at the end of each workday. In the event that no activity is to occur in the work area for the weekend and/or a period of time greater than 48 hours, the Contractor shall ensure that all portable fuel containers are removed from the project site. All equipment shall be maintained in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations and requirements. Equipment and containers shall be inspected daily for leaks. Should a leak occur, contaminated soils and surfaces will be cleaned up and disposed of following the guidelines identified in the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan or equivalent, Materials Safety Data Sheets, and any specifications required by other permits issued for the project. The Contractor shall utilize off-site maintenance and repair shops as much as possible for maintenance and repair of equipment. If maintenance of equipment must occur onsite, fuel/oil pans, absorbent pads, or appropriate containment will be used to capture spills/leaks within all areas. Where feasible, Maintenance of equipment shall occur in upland areas where fuel cannot enter waters of the U.S. or areas subject to Fish and Game Code section 1602, and in areas that do not have potential to support federally threatened or endangered species.

BIO-17 **Firearms and Pets.** Project personnel and any other individuals associated with the project are prohibited from bringing any firearms or dogs or other pets on the project Area during, except those in the possession of authorized security personnel or local, state, or federal law enforcement officials, dogs that may be used to aid in official and approved monitoring

procedures/protocols, or service dogs under Title II and Title III of the American with Disabilities Act. Firearms, open fires, and pets shall be prohibited at all work locations and access roads. Smoking shall be prohibited along the project alignment.

BIO-18 **Best Management Practices.** Appropriate BMPs shall be used by the Contractor to control erosion and sedimentation and to capture debris and contaminants from construction to prevent their deposition in waterways. Erosion and sediment control devices used for the proposed project, including fiber rolls and bonded fiber matrix, shall be made from biodegradable materials such as jute, with no plastic mesh, to avoid creating a wildlife entanglement hazard.

BIO-19 **Cross-country Vehicle Use.** Cross-country vehicle and equipment use outside of approved designated work areas and access roads shall be prohibited to prevent unnecessary ground and vegetation disturbance.

BIO-20 **Injured or Dead Wildlife.** Any injured or dead wildlife encountered during project-related activities shall be reported to the project Biologist, biological monitor, CDFW, or a CDFW-approved veterinary facility as soon as possible to report the observation and determine the best course of action. For special-status species, the project Biologist shall notify by phone or email the County, USFWS, and/or CDFW, as appropriate, within 24 hours of the discovery.

BIO-21 **Checking Beneath Vehicles.** The ground beneath all parked equipment and vehicles shall be inspected for wildlife before moving.

BIO-22 **Fugitive Dust Abatement.** Water applied to dirt roads and construction areas for dust abatement shall be used the minimal amount needed to meet safety and air quality standards to prevent the formation of puddles, which could attract wildlife. Pooled rainwater or floodwater within retention basins shall be removed to avoid attracting wildlife to the active work areas.

BIO-23 **Pre-Construction Nesting Bird Survey:** If construction or other project activities are scheduled to occur during the bird breeding season (typically February 1 through August 31 for raptors and February 15 through August 31 for the majority of migratory bird species), a pre-construction nesting-bird survey shall be conducted by a qualified avian biologist to ensure that active bird nests will not be disturbed or destroyed. The survey shall be completed no more than three days prior to initial ground disturbance. The nesting-bird survey shall include the project site and adjacent areas where project activities have the potential to affect active nests, either directly or indirectly due to construction activity or noise. If an active nest is identified, the biologist shall establish an appropriately sized disturbance-limit buffer around the nest using flagging or staking. Construction activities shall not occur within any disturbance-limit buffer zones until the nest is deemed inactive by the qualified biologist. If construction activities cease for a period of greater than three days during the bird breeding season, a pre-construction nesting bird survey shall be conducted prior to the commencement of activities. Final construction buffers or setback distances shall be determined by the qualified biologist in coordination with USFWS and CDFW on a case-by-case basis, depending on the species, season in which disturbance shall occur, the type of disturbance, and other factors that could influence susceptibility to disturbance (e.g., topography, vegetation, existing disturbance levels, etc.).

BIO-24 **General Impact Avoidance and Minimization Measures.** Minimization of Impacts to Migratory Birds and Raptors: To reduce indirect impacts on migratory birds and raptors, the project shall comply with APLIC 2012 Guidelines for overhead utilities, as appropriate, to minimize avian collisions with transmission facilities (APLIC 2012). All electrical components on the project site shall either be underground or the transmission lines and poles will follow design plans recommended by APLIC (i.e., installing covers over the insulator and conductor on the center phase, installing phase covers over all three insulators and conductors for three phase transmission lines, lowering and/or replacing the crossarm with a longer cross arm on pole-top pin constructions), or utilizing link marking devices (e.g., aerial marker spheres, spirals, or suspended devices).

b) **No Impact.** No riparian habitat or other sensitive natural communities were identified within the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not have a substantial adverse effect on any riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community and no impact would occur.

c) **Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated.** SWCA conducted an aquatic resources delineation for the project site. Aquatic resources and data collected in the field were evaluated to determine the extent of potentially regulated aquatic resources within the review area. The review area, including a 100-foot buffer around the project site, was assessed for potentially jurisdictional aquatic resources.

Twenty-five non-wetland aquatic resource features were recorded in the review area. No wetlands were identified. Features consist of a network of poorly defined braided and single-thread channels, and most features consist of a series of discontinuous ordinary high-water mark (OHWM) segments. San Felipe Creek is the only feature associated with a mapped National Hydrography Dataset stream feature (Appendix D of this Initial Study).

Aquatic resources within the review area did not include any Wetland Waters of the United States (WOUS)/Wetland Waters of the State (WS) but did include non-wetland WOUS/non-wetland WS, and CDFW jurisdictional resources (streambed and associated riparian habitat) (Appendix D of this Initial Study).

Total potential temporary impacts to aquatic resources are estimated to be approximately 1.21 acres (8,879 linear feet) to USACE non-wetland-WOUS and to California Water Boards non-wetland-WS, as well as approximately 13.01 acres (12,838 linear feet) to CDFW Jurisdictional Resources (Appendix D of this Initial Study). Under the current design, no permanent impacts are anticipated to result from the installation of project-related battery storage facilities and substations. Permanent impacts may result from the solar array footings and installation of internal roads.

Impacts to aquatic features may require permits from several regulatory agencies pursuant to federal and State laws. Jurisdictional waters would require certification compliance with Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (CWA) (USACE) and the Porter-Cologne Act (RWQCB), and an agreement pursuant to California Fish and Game Code Sections 1600 and 1602 (CDFW). With implementation of Mitigation Measure BIO-25, impacts to jurisdictional waters would be reduced to a level less than significant with compliance to aquatic resources regulatory permitting.

The use of groundwater has the potential to indirectly impact desert pupfish should the use of groundwater significantly alter groundwater flows that feed the San Felipe Creek riparian trough. With the implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-26 through BIO-29 would reduce the potential impact to a level less than significant.

Mitigation Measure

BIO-25 **Aquatic Resources Regulatory Permitting:** ~~If p~~Project-related impacts that will occur ~~to the riparian areas or areas~~ in any resource subject to Fish and Game Code section 1602 shall be mitigated at a minimum of 2:1 ratio

(two acres of mitigation for every impact to one acre of resource). The project proponent shall obtain all necessary regulatory permits for resources that may also fall under the jurisdiction of the USACE, CDFW, and/or RWQCB, a regulatory permit with those agencies is needed prior to the impact occurring. Refer to the *Aquatic Resource Delineation Report for the Aquatic Resources Delineation Report for the Seville 4 & 5 Solar Project* (Appendix D of this Initial Study) for preliminary determination of regulatory limits that of areas that may be regulated by USACE, CDFW, or RWQCB. Permitting includes preparation and submittal of a Pre-Construction Notification under Section 404 of the federal CWA, an Application for Water Quality Certification under Section 401 of the federal CWA and a notification of Lake or Streambed Alteration under Section 1600 of the California Fish and Game Code. A completed CEQA document, and Notice of Determination, will be necessary to submit along with the applications. Other items such as finalized project plans, quantities of fill material, supporting technical studies, etc., are also submitted along with the applications. As a part of this process, the project must also identify and approve mitigation through the respective agencies.

Mitigation shall include: onsite or offsite options or land acquisition that is conserved and managed in perpetuity for the resource; could include, payment of an in-lieu fee to a conservation organization; and/or types of mitigation can include restoration, creation, rehabilitation, enhancement, or other types of habitat improvement. Typically, the type of mitigation and final acreage of mitigation is negotiated shall be approved by with the regulatory agencies during the permitting process.

BIO-26 Prior to grading, grubbing or other ground disturbing activities, the project proponent shall install one shallow-groundwater monitoring well at a CDFW and County-approved location and design within Assessor's Parcel Number 018-170-067-000 or similarly situated location within the San Felipe Creek, or the project proponent shall install two shallow-groundwater monitoring wells, one at a CDFW and County-approved location and design within the footprint of Seville 4, and one groundwater monitoring well at a CDFW and County-approved location and design within the footprint of Seville 5.

BIO-27 30 days prior to the installation of the shallow-groundwater monitoring well, the project proponent shall obtain CDFW and County approval of a final groundwater management plan (Groundwater Plan). The Plan shall demonstrate necessary funding to endow a third-party to maintain the well(s), monitor, collect and record groundwater level data, analyze and report the data to CDFW and the County at a meaningful interval or triggering event(s) identified in the CDFW and County-approved Groundwater Plan. The Groundwater Plan shall identify specific and quantifiable thresholds for implementing a suite of adaptive management strategies. The Groundwater Plan shall include the immediate discontinuation of temporary and permanent groundwater pumping, and identify alternative sources of water as viable adaptive management strategies. The Groundwater Plan shall require written notification to CDFW and the County upon commencement of well pumping in excess of 500 gallons per day. The date and quantity of all water use shall be logged daily during construction and decommissioning, and monthly during operations and maintenance. The Groundwater Plan

shall be reviewed every five years and revised with mutual agreement from CDFW and the County.

BIO-28 No chemicals shall be used for dust suppression, panel washing, or ancillary uses without the prior written approval of CDFW and the County.

BIO-29 Water infiltration basins of sufficient size and location(s) will be utilized to maximize groundwater percolation of clean water, free of chemicals deleterious to fish and amphibians.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project site is not within any mapped wildlife movement corridor or linkage. Migratory birds may utilize the project site for breeding, nesting, foraging, or transient rest sites. The Salton Sea, located approximately 14 miles east of the project site, hosts one of the most significant, diverse populations of avian species in the United States. However, the project is not expected to substantially impact the movement of resident or migratory birds that utilize the Salton Sea. Wide-ranging mammals, such as coyote, desert kit fox, and American badger may utilize the project site for denning or foraging. However, as required by Mitigation Measure BIO-10, fencing installed around the project would be designed to allow for the passage of wildlife. Depending on the fencing material, the bottom of the fence line would have gaps of approximately 4-6 inches and knuckled back to create a smooth edge. Therefore, a less than significant impact would occur.

e) **Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated.** As described in Responses IV. a-c), the proposed project has the potential to impact special-status plant and wildlife species, and aquatic resources during construction. However, the proposed project would not conflict with any local policies or ordinances protecting biological resources with implementation of mitigation. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-25 would reduce potential impacts to special-status plants, wildlife, and aquatic resources to a less than significant level.

f) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not conflict with the provisions of any adopted habitat conservation plans or natural community plans. Therefore, no impact would occur.

V Cultural Resources				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to §15064.5?	☐	☒	☐	☐
b) Cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of an archaeological resource pursuant to §15064.5?	☐	☒	☐	☐
c) Disturb any human remains, including those interred outside of dedicated cemeteries?	☐	☒	☐	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Cultural Resources Constraints Analysis of the Seville 5 Project* prepared by SWCA. The redacted report (which removes confidential site location information) is provided as Appendix E of this Initial Study.

a) Less than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated. SWCA prepared a *Cultural Resources Constraints Analysis* (Appendix E of this Initial Study) for the proposed project, which included a cultural resource literature and records search, Sacred Files search, and cultural resource survey. The results are summarized below.

Cultural Resource Literature and Records Search

On April 24, 2023, SWCA conducted an archaeological literature and records search at the South Coastal Information Center (SCIC) of the California Historical Resource Information System (CHRIS), located at California San Diego State University. The search compiled information on previously recorded cultural resources and investigations within a 0.25-mile radius of the project area. The records search indicated 10 previous cultural resource investigations have been conducted within the project area and 0.25-mile radius. One previous study overlaps approximately 9 percent of the project area (Appendix E of this Initial Study).

These investigations resulted in the identification of 72 previously recorded cultural resources within the project area and surrounding 0.25-mile area. This total includes 21 prehistoric archaeological sites, three historic archaeological sites, two multi-component sites, 24 prehistoric, isolated artifacts, and 22 historic isolated finds. Of these 72 resources, one prehistoric site (CA-IMP-012151) and five isolated finds (P-13-014434, P-13-014435, P-13-014436, P-13-014444, and P-13-014743) have been documented within the project area. None of the previously documented resources within the project area have been evaluated for the NRHP or CRHR (Appendix E of this Initial Study).

Cultural Resource Survey

An intensive pedestrian survey of the project site was conducted from May 15 through 18, 2023. Previously documented archaeological resources were revisited during fieldwork. In addition, 126 newly identified artifacts or clusters of cultural materials in the survey area were recorded which were then consolidated into 18 sites (three previously recorded isolates that were expanded into sites and 15 newly recorded sites) and six newly recorded isolated

finds as shown in Table 6. These resources were preliminary recorded on California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) 523 primary records and continuation forms.

Table 6. Recorded Cultural Resources within the Project Area

Primary No.	Trinomials Consolidated	Resource Type and Description
Archaeological Sites		
P-13-014434	P-13-014434 P-13-014436 P-13-014444 P-13-014445	Historic refuse dump-scatter, ceramic scatter, ceramic concentration-scatter, can scatter, road toss
P-13-014435	P-13-014435	Historic refuse dump-scatter
P-13-014743	P-13-014743	Historic refuse dump-scatter, rock ring
SWCA-79383-S-1005	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter, can scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1020	N/A	Historic well/cistern, refuse dump-scatter, concrete cylindrical water conveyance feature
SWCA-79383-S-1023	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1024	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1042	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter, lithic and ceramic scatter, ceramic concentration-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1063	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1065	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter, can scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1072	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1097	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1111	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1114	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1115	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter, can scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1118	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1119	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
SWCA-79383-S-1120	N/A	Historic refuse dump-scatter
Isolated Artifacts		
SWCA-79383-I-1007	N/A	Two historic 1-quart paper-sided oil can lids
SWCA-79383-I-1019	N/A	Two historic 1-quart paper-sided oil can lids

Primary No.	Trinomials Consolidated	Resource Type and Description
SWCA-79383-I-1041	N/A	Historic metal can
SWCA-79383-I-1047	N/A	Historic metal can
SWCA-79383-I-1058	N/A	Prehistoric projectile point
SWCA-79383-I-1120	N/A	Historic metal can

Source: Appendix E of this Initial Study

Sacred Lands File Search

The results of the Sacred Lands File search by the Native American Historical Commission were received on May 3, 2023. The results were positive and indicate the presence of Native American Sacred Lands in the project area.

Impact Analysis

As previously mentioned above, none of the previously documented resources within the project area have been evaluated for the NRHP or CRHR and are therefore, not considered Historical Resources for the purposes of CEQA. However, the results of the due diligence study (Appendix E of this Initial Study) identified 18 archaeological sites and six isolated finds in the project area. Although these resources were preliminary documented during the survey effort, these resources will need to be revisited and fully recorded on appropriate DPR 523 forms. Any archeological sites that cannot be avoided by the proposed project shall be evaluated for the CRHR. Construction activities associated with the proposed project will include ground disturbing actions that could impact potential NRHP/CRHR eligible resources and thus, to the maximum extent feasible, the project applicant will design the project to avoid these resources. This potential impact is considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce potential impacts to a level less than significant.

Mitigation Measures:

CR-1 **Contractor Awareness Training.** Prior to project construction, a Contractor Awareness Training Program shall be developed and implemented to train equipment operators about cultural resources. The program shall be designed to inform construction personnel about: federal and state regulations pertaining to cultural resources and tribal cultural resources; the subsurface indicators of resources that shall require a work stoppage; procedures for notifying the lead agency of any occurrences; project-specific requirements and mitigation measures; and enforcement of penalties and repercussions for non-compliance with the program. The training shall be prepared by a qualified professional archaeologist and may be provided either through a brochure, video, or in-person tailgate meeting, as determined appropriate by the archaeologist.

The training shall be provided to all construction supervisors, forepersons, and operators of ground disturbing equipment. All personnel shall be required to sign a training roster. The construction manager is responsible for ensuring that all required personnel receive the training. The construction manager shall provide a copy of the signed training roster to the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department as proof of compliance.

CR-2 **Archaeological Monitoring.** Prior to the start of construction, the project applicant shall retain a qualified professional archaeologist, who meets or exceeds the Secretary of the Interior Professional Qualifications Standards as an archaeologist and a traditionally and culturally affiliated Native American Monitor, to monitor all ground-disturbing activities associated with project construction. Monitoring is not required for placement of equipment or fill inside excavations that were monitored, above-ground construction activities, or redistribution of soils that were previously monitored (such as the return of stockpiles to use in backfilling).

In the event of the discovery of previously unidentified archaeological materials, the contractor shall immediately cease all work activities within approximately 100 feet of the discovery. After cessation of excavation, the contractor shall immediately contact the Imperial County Department of Planning and Development Services. Except in the case of cultural items that fall within the scope of the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act, the discovery of any cultural resource within the project area shall not be grounds for a "stop work" notice or otherwise interfere with the project's continuation except as set forth in this paragraph.

In the event of an unanticipated discovery of archaeological materials during construction, the qualified professional archaeologist shall evaluate the significance of the materials prior to resuming any construction related activities in the vicinity of the find. If the qualified archaeologist determines that the discovery constitutes a significant resource under CEQA and it cannot be avoided, the applicant shall implement an archaeological data recovery program.

b) **Less than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.** As previously discussed above, none of the previously documented resources within the project area have been evaluated for the NRHP or CRHR and are therefore, not considered Historical Resources for the purposes of CEQA. However, the results of the due diligence study identified 18 archaeological sites and six isolated finds in the project area and would need to be fully recorded on appropriate DPR 523 forms and further evaluated for the CRHR. Therefore, there is a potential that ground disturbing activities during construction could impact potentially significant archaeological resources. The soil types present within the project area and immediate vicinity are undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds (Qa-Qc) (Appendix F of this Initial Study). Given the likelihood of precontact archaeological sites located in the project area, there is potential for buried precontact archaeological sites to exist in the project area. Therefore, the possibility remains that unanticipated subsurface discoveries may arise during project construction. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce potential impacts to a level less than significant.

c) **Less than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.** During construction of the proposed project, grading, excavation and trenching will be required. Although the potential for encountering subsurface human remains within the project site is low, there remains a possibility that human remains are present beneath the ground surface, and that such remains could be exposed during construction. The potential to encounter human remains is considered a significant impact. Mitigation Measure CR-3 would ensure that the potential impact on previously unknown human remains does not rise to the level of significance pursuant to CEQA.

Mitigation Measure:

CR-3 If subsurface deposits believed to be human in origin are discovered during construction, all work must halt within a 100-foot radius of the discovery. A qualified professional archaeologist who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for prehistoric and historic archaeology and is familiar with the

resources of the region, shall be retained to evaluate the significance of the find, and shall have the authority to modify the no work radius as appropriate, using professional judgment. The following notifications shall apply, depending on the nature of the find:

If the find includes human remains, or remains that are potentially human, the professional archaeologist shall ensure reasonable protection measures are taken to protect the discovery from disturbance (AB 2641). The archaeologist shall notify the Imperial County Coroner (per § 7050.5 of the Health and Safety Code). The provisions of § 7050.5 of the California Health and Safety Code, § 5097.98 of the California PRC, and AB 2641 will be implemented.

If the Coroner determines the remains are Native American and not the result of a crime scene, the Coroner will notify the NAHC, which then will designate a Native American Most Likely Descendant (MLD) for the project (§ 5097.98 of the PRC). The designated MLD will have 48 hours from the time access to the property is granted to make recommendations concerning treatment of the remains. If the landowner does not agree with the recommendations of the MLD, the NAHC may mediate (§ 5097.94 of the PRC). If no agreement is reached, the landowner must rebury the remains where they will not be further disturbed (§ 5097.98 of the PRC). This will also include either recording the site with the NAHC or the appropriate Information Center; using an open space or conservation zoning designation or easement; or recording a reinternment document with the county in which the property is located (AB 2641). Work may not resume within the no-work radius until the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department, through consultation as appropriate, determine that the treatment measures have been completed to their satisfaction.

VI Energy				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Result in potentially significant environmental impact due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Seville 5 Solar Energy Assessment* contained within the *Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Technical Report* prepared by SWCA. This report is provided as Appendix B of this Initial Study.

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The following impact analysis focuses on the sources of energy that are relevant to the proposed project: electricity, natural gas, and the fuel necessary for project construction and operation.

Electricity and Natural Gas

The project proposes to construct a 65-MW solar energy generation facility with accompanying 130-MW BESS on approximately 270 acres of land. Operation of the proposed project would not result in the consumption of electricity or natural gas and thus, would not contribute to the countywide usage. Instead, the project would directly support the RPS goal of increasing the percentage of electricity procured from renewable sources.

Fuel

The two sources of energy associated with the project includes the equipment fuel necessary for construction and the automotive fuel necessary for ongoing maintenance activities. For the purposes of this analysis, project increases in automotive fuel consumption are compared with the countywide fuel sales in 2023 (Table 6), the most recent full year of data. This analysis conservatively assumes that all the automobile trips projected to arrive at the project site during operation would be new to Imperial County.

Table 7. Automotive Fuel Sales in Imperial County 2017-2023

Year	Total Gasoline Fuel Sales (million gallons)	Total Diesel Fuel Sales (million gallons)
2017	74	11
2018	78	20
2019	73	21
2020	59	22
2021	56	27
2022	48	23

Year	Total Gasoline Fuel Sales (million gallons)	Total Diesel Fuel Sales (million gallons)
2023	69	26

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

Energy and fuel consumption associated with the proposed project is summarized in Table 7. The fuel expenditure necessary to construct the proposed project would be temporary, lasting only as long as project construction. As shown in Table 7, the project's gasoline fuel consumption during construction is estimated to be 137,610 gallons, which would increase the annual countrywide gasoline fuel usage by 0.001 percent (Appendix B of this Initial Study).

The proposed project's fuel consumption during construction would have a nominal effect on local and regional energy supplies. No unusual project characteristics would necessitate the use of construction equipment that would be less energy efficient than at comparable construction sites in the region or the state. Construction contractors would purchase their own gasoline and diesel fuel from local suppliers and would judiciously use fuel supplies to minimize costs due to waste and subsequently maximize profits. Additionally, construction equipment fleet turnover and increasingly stringent state and federal regulations on engine efficiency combined with state regulations limiting engine idling times and requiring recycling of construction debris, would further reduce the amount of transportation fuel demand during project construction. For these reasons, it is expected that construction fuel consumption associated with the project would not be any more inefficient, wasteful, or unnecessary than other similar development projects of this nature.

Table 8. Proposed Project Energy and Fuel Consumption

Energy Type	Annual Energy Consumption	Percentage Increase Countywide
Electricity Consumption	0 kWh	0.0
Natural Gas	0 therms	0.0
Automative Fuel Consumption		
Construction	137,610 gallons	0.001
Operations	11,949 gallons	0.0001

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

Once construction is completed, the project would be remotely controlled. No employees would be based at the project site. The only operational emissions associated with the project would be associated with motor vehicle use for routine maintenance work, and site security as well as panel upkeep and cleaning. As shown in Table 7, the project's gasoline fuel consumption during operation would be approximately 11,949 gallons per year, which would increase the annual countywide automotive fuel consumption by 0.0001 percent (Appendix B of this Initial Study).

Fuel consumption associated with both the construction equipment needed to construct the project and the operational vehicle trips generated by the project during ongoing maintenance activities would not be considered inefficient, wasteful, or unnecessary comparison to other similar developments in the region.

Based on these considerations, the proposed project would not result in potentially significant environmental impacts due to wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources, during project construction or operation. Therefore, this is considered a less than significant impact.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project involves the construction of a renewable energy and storage facility. Once in operation, it will decrease the need for energy

from fossil fuel–based power plants in the state. The result would be a net increase in electricity resources available to the regional grid, generated from a renewable source. Therefore, the project would directly support the RPS goal of increasing the percentage of electricity procured from renewable sources. Additionally, the project would also be consistent with Imperial County's General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, Objective 9.2 which encourages renewable energy developments. Therefore, the project would directly support state and local plans for renewable energy development and would be considered a less than significant impact.

VII Geology and Soils				
Environmental Issue Area:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Would the project:				
a) Directly or indirectly cause potential substantial adverse effects, including the risk of loss, injury or death involving:				
i. Rupture of a known earthquake fault, as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Map issued by the State Geologist for the area or based on other substantial evidence of a known fault? Refer to Division of Mines and Geology Special Publication 42?	☐	☐	☒	☐
ii. Strong seismic ground shaking?	☐	☐	☒	☐
iii. Seismic-related ground failure, including liquefaction?	☐	☐	☒	☐
iv. Landslides?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Be located on a geologic unit or soil that is unstable, or that would become unstable as a result of the project and potentially result in on- or off-site landslide, lateral spreading, subsidence, liquefaction, or collapse?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Be located on expansive soil, as defined in Table 18-1B of the Uniform Building Code (1994), creating substantial direct or indirect risk to life or property?	☐	☐	☒	☐
e) Have soils incapable of adequately supporting the use of septic tanks or alternative wastewater disposal systems where sewers are not available for the disposal of wastewater?	☐	☐	☐	☒
f) Directly or indirectly destroy a unique paleontological resource or site or unique geologic feature?	☐	☒	☐	☐

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact**. According to the DOC's California Earthquake Hazards Zone Application (EQ Zapp), the project site is not located within or adjacent to any earthquake fault zone as delineated on the most recent Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Zoning Map (California DOC n.d.). However, the Coyote Creek Fault, which is a segment of the San Jacinto Fault Zone is located approximately 2.50 miles southwest of the project site. The proposed project would not result in the construction of any structure intended for human occupancy and all structures and onsite facilities would be designed in accordance with the most recent California Building Code (CBC). Therefore, no impact would occur.

aii) **Less than Significant Impact.** Southern California is a seismically active region, therefore it is highly likely that regional earthquakes would occur that could affect the proposed project. As previously mentioned above, no active faults are underlaying the project site. However, the Coyote Creek Fault is located approximately 2.50 miles southwest of the project site. All structures and onsite facilities would be designed in accordance with the most recent CBC for peak site ground acceleration. Since the design and construction of the project would be required to conform to the specific mandated structural design requirements to protect against strong seismic shaking, the potential impacts due to strong seismic ground shaking are considered to be a less than significant impact.

aiii) **Less than Significant Impact.** Four conditions are generally required for liquefaction to occur, including: 1) saturated soil, 2) loosely packed soil, 3) relatively cohesionless soil, and 4) ground shaking of sufficient intensity must occur to trigger the mechanism. All four conditions may exist to some degree at the project site; however, the project site is not located in an area susceptible to liquefaction hazards (California DOC n.d.). Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of liquefaction in the project area.

As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most current CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of liquefaction. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

aiv) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project site is located in a relatively flat portion of Imperial County and is not identified as an area at risk of landslide (County of Imperial 1997). Therefore, the impact associated with landslides is considered less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** Soil erosion and loss of topsoil could result during construction as grading and construction can loosen surface soils and make soils susceptible to wind and water movement across the surface. Construction activities are regulated under the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) General Permit for Discharges of Storm Water Runoff Associated with Construction Activity (General Construction Permit) which covers stormwater runoff requirements for projects where the total amount of ground disturbance during construction exceeds 1 acre. The proposed project would be required to comply with the General Construction Permit because ground disturbance would exceed 1 acre. Coverage under a General Construction Permit requires the preparation of a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) and submittal of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to comply with the General Construction Permit. The SWPPP would identify best management practices (BMPs) that would reduce any impacts associated with soil erosion or loss of topsoil. Therefore, this impact is considered less than significant.

a) Less than Significant Impact.

Landslides. As described in Response VII. aiv) above, the project site is located in a relatively flat portion of Imperial County and is not identified as an area at risk of landslide (Imperial County 1997). Therefore, the impact associated with landslides is considered less than significant.

Liquefaction. As described in Response VII. aiii) above, the project site is not located in an area susceptible to liquefaction hazards (California DOC n.d.). Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of liquefaction to occur on the project site. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most current CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of liquefaction. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

Lateral Spreading. The potential for lateral spreading to occur on the project site has not yet been determined. Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of lateral spreading to occur on the project site. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most current CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of lateral spreading. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

Subsidence. The potential for subsidence to occur on the project site has not yet been determined. Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of subsidence to occur on the project site. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most current CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of subsidence. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

Collapse. The potential for collapse to occur on the project site has not yet been determined. Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of collapse to occur on the project site. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most current CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of collapse. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The potential for expansive soils to occur on the project site has not yet been determined. Additional geotechnical investigation would be required in order to assess the risk of expansive soils to occur on the project site. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As required by the County and in accordance with local and state building code requirements, any proposed development would be required to complete a geotechnical evaluation of any onsite hazards. As a standard condition of project approval, the proposed project would be constructed in accordance with the most recent CBC and Imperial County Building Code to minimize or avoid the potential hazard of expansive soil. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

c) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not require the use of septic systems or alternative wastewater systems to accommodate wastewater needs. Therefore, no impact is identified for this issue area.

d) **Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated.** The following information is summarized from the *Paleontological Resources Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Energy Project* prepared by SWCA. This report is provided as Appendix F of this Initial Study.

Paleontological resources are typically impacted when earthwork activities, such as mass excavation cut into geological deposits (formations) with buried fossils. One area in which paleontological resources appear to be concentrated in this region is the shoreline of ancient Lake Cahuilla, which would have encompassed the present-day Salton Sea. The lake covered much of the Imperial Valley and created an extensive lacustrine environment. Lake Cahuilla experienced several fill recession episodes before it finally dried up about 300 years ago.

An analysis of existing data was conducted by SWCA, including a review of geologic maps, scientific literature, museum records, and other relevant site-specific geologic information, to classify the paleontological sensitivity of the geologic units present at the surface and subsurface and to determine the potential for significant impacts to scientifically significant paleontological resources due to implementation or construction of the project.

Geologic Units

According to the paleontological resources technical report prepared for the proposed project, the surface of the project site is mapped with undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds (Qa-Qc) (Appendix F of this Initial Study). Although not mapped at the surface of the project site, artificial fill was present at the surface of the area at depths of 2 to 3 feet from the in-filling of San Felipe Creek and farming activities.

The undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds are Holocene in age (less than 11,700 years ago) and consist of recently deposited surficial alluvial sediments as well as tan-gray claystone, sand, and gravel deposited in Lake Cahuilla, an ancient freshwater lake that previously occupied a major portion of the Salton Trough (Appendix F of this Initial Study). Additionally, older, Pleistocene-age Lake Cahuilla sediments likely underlie these Holocene deposits at a moderate depth, which have also produced numerous fossils. The depth of the contact between the Holocene-age and Pleistocene-age Lake Cahuilla deposits in the project area is currently unknown; however, the Pleistocene-age ancient Lake Cahuilla sediments are likely to be present at a relatively shallow depth (Appendix F of this Initial Study). Due to the abundant remains of freshwater invertebrate and vertebrate fossils from the sediments of ancient Lake Cahuilla, the undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds (Qa-Qc) have a high paleontological sensitivity.

Paleontological Potential Classification

Paleontological potential ("sensitivity") is defined as the potential for a geologic unit to produce scientifically significant fossils. This is determined by rock type, history of the geologic unit in producing significant fossils, and fossil localities recorded from that unit. Paleontological sensitivity is derived from the known fossil data collected from the entire geologic unit, not just from a specific survey. In *Standard Procedures for the Assessment and Mitigation of Adverse Impacts to Paleontological Resources*, the Society of Vertebrate Paleontology (SVP) defines four categories of paleontological sensitivity for rock units: high, low, undetermined, and no potential (Appendix F of this Initial Study).

According to the paleontological resources technical report prepared for the proposed project, artificial fill may contain fossils, however, these fossils are out of stratigraphic context and not important for scientific study and therefore, is considered to have no paleontological sensitivity (Appendix F of this Initial Study). Additionally, Holocene alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas (Qa) has low to high paleontological sensitivity increasing with depth (e.g., 5 feet below ground surface). Holocene Cahuilla Beds (Qc), Pliocene Brawley Formation (Qbr), middle to early Pleistocene Ocotillo Formation (Qo), middle Pleistocene to middle Pliocene Palm Spring Formation (Tps), and late and middle Pliocene Borrego Formation (Tbo) all have a high paleontological sensitivity, regardless of depth. Due to the abundant remains of freshwater invertebrate and vertebrate fossils from the sediments of ancient Lake Cahuilla, the undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas

and Cahuilla Beds (Qa-Qc) have a high paleontological sensitivity (Appendix F of this Initial Study).

Museum Records Search

The San Diego Natural History Museum (SDNHM) performed a museum records search for fossil localities within the vicinity of the project site. Based on the results of the museum records search, the SDNHM does not possess records of paleontological resources from within a mile of the project site; however, they note high paleontological sensitivity of the geologic units anticipated to be present either at the surface or in the subsurface within the project site (Appendix F of this Initial Study).

Reconnaissance Survey

SWCA conducted a paleontological pedestrian field reconnaissance survey to verify geologic mapping, to determine if sediments observed at the surface are conducive to the preservation of paleontological resources, and to record any previously unrecorded paleontological resources that may be at the surface.

No newly identified paleontological resources were observed or recorded during the pedestrian reconnaissance survey; however, sedimentary deposits with the potential to preserve paleontological resources (i.e., undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds [Qa-Qc]) were observed within the project area (Appendix F of this Initial Study).

Potential Impacts

Ground-disturbing activities associated with the project may impact geologic units of relatively high paleontological sensitivity. Any fossils encountered during ground disturbances in previously undisturbed sediments of high paleontological sensitivity would be at risk for damage or destruction from construction activities, which would constitute a potentially significant impact under CEQA. However, with implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 through CR-5 would ensure that fossils, if encountered, are assessed for significance and, if deemed significant, salvaged and curated with an accredited repository. With implementation of mitigation, impacts would be reduced to a less than significant level.

Mitigation Measure

GEO-1 **Retain a Qualified Paleontologist.** Prior to the issuance of any permits allowing ground-disturbing activities, an SVP-qualified paleontologist (Qualified Paleontologist) will be retained by the project applicant and approved by the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department (lead agency). The Qualified Paleontologist will prepare a Paleontological Resources Monitoring Plan (PRMP) to be approved by the lead agency. Following approval of the PRMP, the Qualified Paleontologist will implement the PRMP and will provide technical and compliance oversight of all work as it relates to paleontological resources, will be responsible for ensuring the employee training provisions are implemented during implementation of the project, and will report to the project area (as needed and identified in the final PRMP) in the event that potential paleontological resources are encountered.

GEO-2 **Prepare a Paleontological Resources Monitoring Plan.** A PRMP will be prepared by the Qualified Paleontologist that incorporates all available geologic data for the project in order to determine the necessary level of effort for monitoring based on the planned rate of excavation and grading activities, the materials being excavated, and the depth of excavation. The PRMP establishes the ground rules for the entire paleontological resource mitigation program and will require approval by the lead agency as a condition of approval of the grading permits for the Project. The Qualified

Paleontologist will implement the PRMP as the project paleontologist, program supervisor, and principal investigator. The PRMP will incorporate the results *of Paleontological Resources Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Energy Project* (Appendix F of this Initial Study) this paleontological resources assessment, relevant geotechnical investigations, and final engineering/grading plans for the project. The PRMP will include processes and procedures for paleontological monitoring, fossil salvaging (if needed), reporting, and curation (if needed). The PRMP will also require the Qualified Paleontologist to prepare a report of the findings of the monitoring efforts after construction is completed that will be sent to the lead agency for approval and to mark the completion of the paleontological monitoring program. The PRMP will also require the Qualified Paleontologist to obtain a curatorial arrangement with an accredited and County-approved repository, such as the SDNHM in San Diego, California.

GEO-3 **Conduct Worker Training.** The Qualified Paleontologist shall develop Worker Environmental Awareness Program training to educate the construction crew on the legal requirements for preserving fossil resources, as well as the procedures to follow in the event of a fossil discovery. This training program shall be given to the crew before ground-disturbing work commences and shall include handouts to be given to new workers as needed.

GEO-4 **Monitor for Paleontological Resources.** As described in the PRMP approved by the lead agency for the project, full-time paleontological monitoring will occur during ground-disturbing activities that impact previously undisturbed sediments of Holocene Cahuilla Beds (Qc), Pliocene Brawley Formation (Qbr), middle to early Pleistocene Ocotillo Formation (Qo), middle Pleistocene to middle Pliocene Palm Spring Formation (Tps), and late and middle Pliocene Borrego Formation (Tbo), regardless of depth. Full-time monitoring shall occur during ground-disturbing activities that impact previously undisturbed sediments of Holocene alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas (Qa) at depths of 5 feet below ground surface or greater. Monitoring shall not be required when ground-disturbing activities are less than 5 feet below ground surface in areas mapped as Holocene alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas (Qa), or when impacting only artificial fill or previously disturbed sediments, regardless of depth. Monitoring shall be conducted by a qualified paleontological monitor who meets the standards of the SVP and who should be supervised by the Qualified Paleontologist. The Qualified Paleontologist may periodically inspect construction activities to adjust the level of monitoring (in consultation with the lead agency) in response to subsurface conditions. Monitoring efforts can be increased, reduced, or ceased entirely if determined adequate by the Qualified Paleontologist. Paleontological monitoring should include inspection of exposed sedimentary units during active excavations within sensitive geologic sediments. The monitor shall have authority to temporarily divert activity away from exposed fossils to evaluate the significance of the find and, should the fossils be determined significant, professionally and efficiently recover the fossil specimens and collect associated data. The monitor shall record pertinent geologic data and collect appropriate sediment samples from any fossil localities. Recovered fossils shall be prepared to the point of curation, identified by qualified experts, listed in a database to facilitate analysis, and deposited in an accredited repository (i.e., SDNHM in San Diego, California).

GEO-5 **Prepare a Paleontological Resources Monitoring Report.** Upon conclusion of ground-disturbing activities, the Qualified Paleontologist

overseeing implementation of the PRMP, including paleontological monitoring, will prepare a final Paleontological Resources Monitoring Report (PRMR) that documents the paleontological monitoring efforts for the project and describes any paleontological resources discoveries observed and/or recorded during ground-disturbing activities. If paleontological resources are curated, the PRMR and any associated data pertinent to the curated specimen(s) will be submitted to the designated repository. A copy of the final PRMR shall be filed with the lead agency for approval. Approval of the PRMR by the lead agency will signify completion of the monitoring program.

VIII Greenhouse Gas Emissions				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Generate greenhouse gas emissions, either directly or indirectly, that may have a significant impact on the environment?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Conflict with an applicable plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Assessment for the Seville 5 Solar Project* prepared by SWCA. This report is provided as Appendix B of this Initial Study.

a) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Prominent greenhouse gases (GHGs) contributing to the greenhouse effect are carbon dioxide (CO_2), methane (CH_4), and nitrogen oxide (N_2O). Human-caused emissions of these GHGs in excess of natural ambient concentrations are believed to be responsible for intensifying the greenhouse effect and leading to a trend of unnatural warming of the earth's climate, known as global climate change or global warming.

The project site is located within the Salton Sea Air Basin, regulated by the ICAPCD. To date the ICAPCD has not adopted GHG emission significance thresholds applicable to potential development. Section 15064.7(c) of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that "when adopting or using thresholds of significance, a lead agency may consider thresholds of significance previously adopted or recommended by other public agencies, or recommended by experts, provided the decision of the lead agency to adopt such thresholds is supported by substantial evidence" (14 CCR 15064.7(c)). Thus, in the absence of any GHG emissions significance thresholds, the projected emissions are compared to the SCAQMD's numeric threshold of 3,000 metric tons of CO_2e annually (for industrial land use). While this significance threshold is not binding on the ICAPCD or County of Imperial, it is instructive as a comparative metric of the project's potential GHG impact.

The following analysis is broken out by a discussion of potential impacts during construction and operation of the project. The CalEEMod 2022.1.1.17 air quality model was used to calculate the GHG emissions associated with construction and operation of the proposed project. The CalEEMod worksheets are included in Appendix B of this Initial Study.

Construction

Construction of the project would result in GHG emissions, which are primarily associated with use of off-road construction equipment, on-road vendor trucks, and worker vehicles.

Table 8 presents the estimated construction emissions for the project from on-site and off-site emission sources.

As shown in Table 8, the estimated total GHG emissions during construction would be approximately 1,405 $MTCO_2e$ over the construction period, which is below SCAQMD's threshold. Estimated project-generated construction emissions amortized over 20 years would be approximately 70.25 $MTCO_2e$ per year. As with project-generated construction

criteria air pollutant emissions, GHG emissions generated during construction of the project would occur only when construction is active, lasting only for the duration of the construction period, and would not represent a long-term source of GHG emissions.

Project decommissioning emissions were not calculated as the equipment and fuel types that would exist 20 or more years in the future are unknown. Also as described above, it is anticipated that the decommissioning emissions would be lower than the construction emissions.

Table 9. Estimated Annual Construction Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Construction Years	Metric Tons per Year			
	CO_2e	CO_2	N_2O	CH_4
2026	566	558	0.02	0.02
2027	839	829	0.03	0.03
Total	1,405	1,387	0.05	0.05
Amortized Construction Emissions	**70.25**			
SCAQMD GHG Threshold	N/A	N/A	N/A	3,000

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

Operation

Operation of the project would generate GHG emissions through motor vehicle trips to and from the project site and water use. The estimated operational project generated GHG emissions are shown in Table 9. As shown in Table 9, estimated annual project-generated GHG emissions would be approximately 122 MT CO_2e per year as a result of project operations.

After summing the amortized project construction emissions, total GHGs generated by the project would be approximately 192 MT CO_2e per year, which is below SCAQMD's threshold. Therefore, the project's GHG impact would be less than significant.

The project would offset GHG emissions through renewable energy generation and thereby result in environmental benefits by lessening the impacts of global climate change, as such, the annual displaced GHG emissions were estimated to include all direct and indirect emissions associated with implementation of the project. As shown in Table 9, the project's annual indirect GHG emissions from the displacement of fossil fuel fired electricity generation is significantly higher than the project's annualized direct and indirect emissions sources; as such, the overall effect of the project is to reduce GHG emissions. Therefore, the project would have a beneficial GHG emissions impact, and this is considered a less than significant impact.

Table 10. Estimated Annual Operational Greenhouse Gas Emissions

	Metric Tons per Year			
	CO_2	CH_4	N_2O	CO_2e
Mobile	114.2	0.001	0.01	118.2
Water	3.26	<0.001	<0.001	3.27
Total	117.46	0.001	0.01	121.5
Amortized Construction Emissions				**70.25**
Total Operational & Amortized Construction GHGs				**192**
Displaced Emissions (from Project Operation)				**64,546**
SCAQMD GHG Threshold				**3,000**

Source: Appendix B of this Initial Study

b) **Less Than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not conflict with any adopted plans, policies, or regulations adopted for the purpose of reducing GHG emissions. As discussed above in Response VIII. a), the project-generated GHG emissions would not exceed GHG significance thresholds. The proposed project is consistent with the following:

- AB 32 scoping plan strategies to increase the total amount of renewable energy sources consistent with the goal of the state's RPS.
- CARB's emission reduction strategy presented in the 2008 Scoping Plan addressing critical measures directed at emission sources.

Therefore, impacts would be less than significant.

IX Hazards and Hazardous Materials				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through the routine transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Create a significant hazard to the public or the environment through reasonably foreseeable upset and accident conditions involving the likely release of hazardous materials into the environment?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Be located on a site which is included on a list of hazardous materials sites compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?	☐	☐	☐	☒
f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒
g) Expose people or structures, either directly or indirectly, to a significant risk of loss, injury, or death involving wildland fires?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** Vehicles and equipment used for construction would contain or require the temporary use of potentially hazardous substances, such as fuels, lubricating oils, and hydraulic fluid. Hazardous substances would be stored in transportable containment trailers at locations within the construction staging area to minimize potential for accidental releases and/or spills.

Transportation of hazardous materials relating to the battery system includes electrolyte and graphite and would occur during construction, operation (if replacement of batteries is needed) and decommissioning (removal of the batteries). All of these various materials would be transported and handled in compliance with the Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) regulations. Therefore, the likelihood of an accidental release during transport or residual contamination following accidental release is not anticipated.

Lithium-ion batteries used in the storage system contain cobalt oxide, manganese dioxide, nickel oxide, carbon, electrolyte, and polyvinylidene fluoride. Of these chemicals, only electrolyte should be considered hazardous, inflammable and could react dangerously when mixed with water. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) regulates transport of lithium-ion batteries under the DOT's Hazardous Materials Regulations (HMR) (49 CFR Parts 171-180). The HMR apply to any material DOT determines can pose an unreasonable risk to health, safety, and property when transported in commerce. Lithium-ion batteries must conform to all applicable HMR requirements when offered for transportation or transported by air, highway, rail, or water. Additionally, carbon (as graphite) is flammable and could pose a fire hazard. Fire protection is achieved through project design features, such as monitoring, diagnostics and a fire suppression system. The project would be required to comply with state laws and county ordinance restrictions, which regulate, and control hazardous materials handled on site.

Further, the proposed project would be required to comply with all applicable rules and regulations involving hazardous materials, including the State of California CCR Title 23 Health and Safety Regulations, the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) requirements, the Hazardous Waste Control Act, the California Accidental Release Prevention (CalARP) Program, and the California Health and Safety Code. Compliance with these measures would reduce any potential risk or impact associated with the transport, use, or disposal of hazardous materials. This impact is considered less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** As described in Response IX. a) above, the proposed project would require the storage of hazardous materials; however, hazardous substances would be stored in transportable containment trailers at locations within the construction staging area to minimize potential for accidental releases and/or spills. No other hazardous or potentially hazardous materials will be brought to the project site. Further, the proposed project would be required to comply with all applicable rules and regulations involving hazardous materials, including the State of California CCR Title 23 Health and Safety Regulations, Cal/OSHA requirements, the Hazardous Waste Control Act, CalARP Program, and the California Health and Safety Code. Compliance with these measures would reduce any potential risk or impact associated with the release of hazardous materials into the environment.

The project applicant will coordinate with the Imperial County Fire Department on conditions of approval as part of the CUP to ensure the proposed project would not result in extreme hazards to the public, firefighters, and emergency responders. Conditions of approval would include project plans review and inspections, installation of a water supply capable of supplying the required fire flow, development of an Emergency Operation Plan, and compliance with applicable standards and requirements of the National Fire Protection Association, OSHA, and California Fire Code. With adherence of applicable standards and requirements and conditions of approval as part of the CUP. This impact is considered less than significant.

c) **No Impact.** The project site is not located within 0.25 mile of any existing or proposed schools. The nearest school is Sea View Elementary School located approximately 14 miles northeast of the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not pose a risk to nearby schools and no impact would occur.

d) **No Impact.** Database searches were conducted on December 2, 2024 for potential hazardous sites located on, or within one-quarter mile of the project site using the California

Department of Toxic Substances Control's EnviroStor Database and State Water Resources Control Board's Geotracker database. These databases are an online search and Geographic Information System (GIS) tool for identifying sites that have known contamination or sites for which there may be reasons to further investigate. No reported cases were found on the project site and no active sites were located within one-quarter mile of the project site (California Department of Toxic Substances Control 2024; State Water Resources Control Board 2024). Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would result in no impact related to the project site being located on a listed hazardous materials site pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5

e) **No Impact.** The project site is not located within two miles of a public airport. The nearest airports are the Ocotillo Wells Airport located approximately 7 miles northwest of the project site and the Salton Sea Airport located approximately 9.61 miles northeast of the project site. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the area surrounding the project site and no impact would occur.

f) **No Impact.** The proposed project does not include any alteration to the existing public road network and would not involve blocking or restricting any access routes. The project will use an existing access road as the proposed access road to the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. No impact is identified for this issue area.

g) **No Impact.** The project site is located in the unincorporated area of Imperial County. According to the Seismic and Public Safety Element of the General Plan, the potential for a major fire in the unincorporated areas of the County is generally low (County of Imperial 1997). Based on a review of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection's fire hazard severity zone map, the project site is not located within a fire hazard severity zone (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2023). The proposed project would not introduce features that directly or indirectly increase the risk of wildfire on the project site. No impact is identified for this issue area.

X Hydrology and Water Quality				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Violate any water quality standards or waste discharge requirements or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:				
i. result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;	☐	☐	☒	☐
ii. substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite;	☐	☐	☒	☐
iii. create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or	☐	☐	☒	☐
iv. impede or redirect flood flows?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?	☐	☐	☐	☒
e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** No known or reasonably expected surface water quality issues are anticipated to result from the implementation of the proposed project. Construction activities are regulated under the NPDES General Permit for Discharges of Storm Water Runoff Associated with Construction Activity (General Construction Permit) which covers stormwater runoff requirements for projects where the total amount of ground

disturbance during construction exceeds 1 acre. The project would be required to comply with the General Construction Permit because ground disturbance would exceed 1 acre. Coverage under a General Construction Permit requires the preparation of a SWPPP and submittal of a NOI. The SWPPP will be implemented such that stormwater discharges would not adversely impact human health or the environment, nor contribute to any exceedances of any applicable water quality standards contained in the Colorado River Basin Plan. This impact is considered less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The following information is summarized from the *Water Supply Assessment for the Seville 5 Solar Project* prepared by SWCA. This study is provided as Appendix G of this Initial Study.

Groundwater supply is available from the Ocotillo-Clark Valley Groundwater Basin (Basin Number 7-25). The basin is bounded by the Santa Rosa Mountains to the north and northeast, Coyote Creek and Superstition Mountain faults to the west and south, and the Salton Sea and surface drainage divides to the east. Clark Valley (to the northwest) drains toward Clark Lake (which is dry), whereas the rest of the area drains toward the Salton Sea. The basin is an alluvial-filled valley of stream, alluvial fan, lake, and aeolian deposits (Appendix G of this Initial Study). Recharge is from mountain runoff in the north and east, estimated to be 1,200 acre-feet (AF) per year (AFY) for the Clark Valley portion of the basin and 1,100 AFY for the Ocotillo Valley portion of the basin (Appendix G of this Initial Study). Groundwater generally flows southeastward. The Ocotillo-Clark Valley Groundwater Basin has not been adjudicated. The groundwater storage capacity estimated for Clark Valley is about 450,000 AF, and the capacity estimated for Ocotillo Valley is about 5,800,000 AF. These estimates add to about 6,250,000 AF (Appendix G of this Initial Study).

The proposed project will involve the use of groundwater during construction and operation. The water demand for each phase of the project is detailed below.

Construction Water Demand

The project would require 112.5 AF of water to support construction up to 18-month period. As shown in Table 10, during the construction period, it is estimated that the project would require up to 36,660,000 gallons (112.5 acre-feet) of water. This water would be used for common construction-related activities, including dust control, sanitation, initial system demand, and other miscellaneous purposes.

Operation Water Demand

The project would require up to 7.5 AFY to support operation and maintenance activities. As shown in Table 10, during the 25-year operating period, it is estimated that the project would require up to 2,444,000 gallons (7.5 acre-feet) of water annually. Operational water use will primarily include periodic washing of the PV modules, which is expected to occur twice per year to remove dust and maintain power generation efficiency.

Within the heliostat field, operations would include routine washing of mirrors on a continuous basis and no additives or detergents will be required. Washing would be done using a truck-mounted pressure washer. The washing would require approximately 3.8 AF (1,222,000 gallons) of water per year.

The solar collector would require an estimated 0.4 AF (122,200 gallons) of water per year. Other potable and non-potable facility uses would require an estimated 1.9 AFY (611,000 gallons) of water per year. Limited landscape irrigation would be required at an estimated 0.7 AF (244,400 gallons) of water per year. Fire suppression is estimated at 0.7 AF (244,400 gallons) of water per year.

Table 11. Summary of Project Water Demands

Project Phase	Water Demand (gallons)	Water Demand (AF)
Construction		
Dust Control	31,282,000	96.0
Initial System Demand	3,683,000	11.3
Personnel	1,695,000	5.2
Total Construction Demand	**36,660,000**	**up to 112.5 AF**
Operation		
System Wash Water	1,222,000	3.8
Process Water	122,200	0.4
Facilities (potable and non-potable)	611,000	1.9
Irrigation	244,400	0.7
Fire Suppression	244,400	0.7
Annual Operations Demand	**2,444,000**	**up to 7.5 AFY**

Source: Appendix G of this Initial Study

Water Supply Availability

The Water Supply Assessment prepared for the proposed project assessed whether there are sufficient water supplies to serve the project over the next 20 years. It considered average-year ("normal" year), single dry-year, and multiple dry-year (drought conditions). A multiple dry-year scenario is assumed to be 3 years long for the purposes of the analysis.

Table 11 presents projections for the 18-month construction period with the highest project-related water use (112.5 AF). It uses a conservative approach that assumes total water use during the initial 18 months. Table 12 presents projections for the subsequent 19-year operational period. The existing pumping data refer to the estimated pumping rate for the wells associated with the project area. It was assumed for the purpose of the analysis that all other water use in the basin would remain constant over the 20-year period.

During the construction period of up to approximately 12 to 18 months, the project would use up to approximately 112.5 AF of water for construction activities. Operational water demands, which include system washing and operation of the proposed on-site facilities, would total approximately 7.5 AFY. The Ocotillo-Clark Valley Groundwater Basin has a recharge rate of 1,100 AFY, and the project demand has a projected peak demand of up to 112.5 AF for construction purposes and 7.5 AFY for operational purposes. The net water balance supply for normal, single dry, and multiple dry years is sufficient to meet project purposes.

The project's water supply would be provided by groundwater from two private wells owned by the project proponent. An existing well located in the southeast corner of the parcel immediately below the project site would be used for construction needs. The second well, located in the south-central portion of the project site, would be used for operation and maintenance purposes. Water demand projections in the project area generally account for solar energy developments, such as the project. Further, water supply availability projections generally indicate that sufficient water supplies are available to meet projected water demands for the project.

In conclusion, long-term water demands associated with the project appear to be accounted for; although regional water shortages may occur in the area during the project's lifetime, such conditions may occur regardless of the proposed solar development. The proposed project would not substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with

groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin. This is considered a less than significant impact.

Table 12. Groundwater Availability Projections for Construction (Year 1)

Climate Scenario	Precipitation Recharge (AFY)	Existing Pumping (AFY)	Project Pumping (AFY*)	Total Demand	Balance (AFY)
Normal Scenario	1,100	202**	75	352	748
Single Dry Year	418	202	75	352	66
Multiple Dry Years					
Year 1	506	202	75	352	154
Year 2	649	202	75	352	297
Year 3	231	202	75	352	-121
Multiple Dry-Year Balance					**330**

Source: Appendix G of this Initial Study

Notes:

* For a conservative approach, this assumes that all project construction would happen within the first 12 months.

** This accounts for existing groundwater wells for the initial Seville Solar Project site, lots 1–8, and local water use.

Table 13. Groundwater Availability Projections for Operations (Years 2.5-25)

Climate Scenario	Precipitation Recharge (AFY)	Existing Pumping (AFY)	Project Pumping (AFY)	Total Demand	Balance (AFY)
Normal Scenario	1,100	202	7.5	217	883
Single Dry Year	418	202	7.5	217	201
Multiple Dry Years					
Year 1	506	202	7.5	217	289
Year 2	649	202	7.5	217	432
Year 3	231	202	7.5	217	14
Multiple Dry-Year Balance					**735**

Source: Appendix G of this Initial Study

ci) **Less than Significant Impact**. As discussed in Response X. a) above, construction of the proposed project would result in ground disturbing activities in an area greater than one acre. Therefore, a SWPPP will be developed that implements BMPs that sufficiently avoid any onsite or offsite erosion and runoff from areas proposed for ground disturbance. Therefore this is considered a less than significant impact.

cii) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would not involve the construction of substantial impervious surfaces that would increase the rate of run-off. Construction activities would be localized to the project site boundary, and the surrounding pervious surface would remain similar to pre-project conditions. Water will continue to percolate through the ground, as a majority of the surfaces on the project site will remain

pervious. In this context, the proposed project would not result in substantial increases in run-off. This is considered a less than significant impact.

ciii) **Less than Significant Impact.** Water will continue to percolate through the ground, as a majority of the surfaces on the project site will remain pervious. The proposed project would not create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provided substantial additional sources of polluted runoff. This is considered a less than significant impact.

civ) **Less than Significant Impact.** According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Insurance Rate Map (Map Number 06025C0925C), the majority of the project site is located within Zone X, which is an area determined to be outside of the 0.2 percent annual chance of a flood (FEMA 2024). The southwest portion of the project site is located within a Special Flood Hazard Area, Zone A, which is an area subject to inundation by the 1 percent annual chance flood (100-year flood zone) (FEMA 2024). The Special Flood Hazard Area is associated with San Felipe Creek. San Felipe Creek, in its natural state, previously flowed through the southwest portion of the project site in a southeasterly direction. In the 1970's, the Creek was diverted by an earthen berm constructed along the western boundary of the project site. The existing earthen berm diverts flows from the historic creek flood zone away from the project site. Current FEMA maps do not reflect the existing 7-foot high earthen berm along the western boundary of the project site.

The proposed project would be designed to comply with the County of Imperial Engineering Design Guidelines Manual for the Preparation and Checking of Street Improvements, Drainage and Grading Plans within Imperial County (2008). The proposed retention basin(s) would be sized to capture storm water runoff as if none of it would penetrate into the ground. The County requirement to provide 3 inches of detention per tributary acre would be met and detained runoff would infiltrate the underlying soil.

Any improvements within the Flood Zone A would be designed to comply with the County of Imperial Flood Zone Ordinances and guidelines. Section 91604.00 states that "A Development Permit shall be obtained before construction or development begins within any area of special flood hazards or areas of mudslide (i.e., mudflow) established in Section 91603.01."

Based on the proposed drainage described above, and the project's mandatory compliance with regulations regarding hydrology and drainage at the project site, implementation of the proposed project would not have a substantial impact on the hydrology of the surrounding area. Peak flow runoff from the project site would be directed to and infiltrated in designated retention basins and/or percolate into the ground, such that there would be no increase in on-site or off-site flooding potential. Therefore, on- and off-site drainage and flooding impacts would be less than significant.

d) **No Impact.** The project site is located over 70 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. Therefore, the proposed project is not located in an area at risk of tsunamis.

According to the Seismic and Public Safety Element of the General Plan, the most likely location for a significant seiche to occur is the Salton Sea, which is located approximately 14 miles northeast of the project site. While there have been several seismic events since the formation of the Salton Sea, no significant seiches have occurred to date. A seiche could occur, however, in the Salton Sea under the appropriate seismic conditions. The Salton Sea is proximal to the San Andreas and San Jacinto faults and would be subject to significant seismic ground shaking that could generate a seiche (County of Imperial 2002). The likelihood of seismic activity producing waves large enough to affect the project site is low and therefore, the risk of release of pollutants attributable to inundation is considered low based on no documented history of seiche-induced flooding of the project site. No substantial damage is expected from seiches on the project site, and implementation of the project would not increase the inherent risk of seiches on the project site. No impact would occur.

The southwest portion of the project site is located within a Special Flood Hazard Area, Zone A, which is an area subject to inundation by the 1 percent annual chance flood (100-year flood zone) (FEMA 2024). However, the proposed project would be required to prepare a SWPPP that implements BMPs that would minimize potential impacts related to the risk of releasing pollutants due to project inundation. Therefore, impacts would be considered less than significant.

e) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project's water supply would be provided by groundwater from two private wells owned by the project proponent. As discussed in Response X. b) above, the proposed project would not substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin.

Furthermore, the proposed project would be compliant with all local, state, and federal regulations, including compliance with the NPDES permits with the implementation of BMPs. Compliance with the referenced regulations would reduce any potential impact associated with a water quality control plan to a less than significant impact.

XI Land Use and Planning				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Physically divide an established community?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** The project site is located in a sparsely populated portion of Imperial County. There are no established residential communities located within or in the vicinity of the project site. The nearest residence is approximately 500 west of the project site. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not divide an established community and no impact would occur.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** The project's consistency with applicable land use plans, policies, and regulations is evaluated below.

County of Imperial General Plan. The County adopted the Renewable Energy (RE) and Transmission Element, which includes a RE Zone (RE Overlay Map). The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the RE Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects with an approved CUP. The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of renewable energy facilities while minimizing the impact on other established uses. CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone.

The entire project site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the proposed project would conflict with the RE Overlay Zone because the project is located outside of the area designated for renewable energy projects. Without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone, the proposed project would not be allowed and would conflict with the RE and Transmission Element of the General Plan. However, the applicant is requesting a General Plan amendment and Zone Change to include/classify the project site into the RE Overlay Zone.

As stated in the RE and Transmission Element:

An amendment to the overlay zone would only be approved by the County Board of Supervisors if a future RE project met one of the following two conditions:

- **Adjacent to the Existing RE Overlay Zone:** An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future RE project located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
  - Is not located in a sensitive area
  - Would not result in any significant impacts.

- **"Island Overlay":** An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future RE project that is not located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
  - Is located adjacent (sharing a common boundary) to an existing transmission source
  - Consists of the expansion of an existing RE operation
  - Would not result in any significant environmental impacts (County of Imperial 2016).

The project site is not located adjacent to an existing RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the proposed project will need to meet the criteria identified for the "Island Overlay" to obtain approval of an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone. Table 13 provides an analysis of the project's consistency with the "Island Overlay" criteria. As shown in Table 13, the proposed project would be consistent with the "Island Overlay" criteria because the project is adjacent to an existing transmission source, consists of the expansion of an existing RE operation, and would not result in significant environmental impacts.

The General Plan Amendment and Zone Change requests submitted by the project applicant are subject to approval by the County Board of Supervisors. If approved, the project applicant will be able to request for approval of a CUP to allow the construction and operation of the proposed solar facility and BESS, and the proposed project would be consistent with the RE and Transmission Element of the General Plan.

Table 14. Project Consistency with "Island Overlay" Criteria

Criteria	Criteria Met?
Is located adjacent (sharing a common boundary) to an existing transmission source?	The project site is surrounded by existing renewable energy facilities with gen-ties interconnecting into IID's transmission line network. IID's existing 92 kV "K" Line is located along the eastern border of the project site. The electricity transmitted via IID's "K" Line is ultimately delivered to IID's Anza Substation.
Consists of the expansion of an existing RE operation?	As shown in Figure 2, the area to the southeast of the project site has been developed with renewable energy facilities (Seville 1 and Seville solar facilities, and Titan I Solar facility) (Figure 2). The proposed project involves the construction of a solar facility with an integrated BESS adjacent to the Seville 1 and 2 solar facilities. The proposed project would be capable of generating up to 65 MW of solar energy, thereby expanding solar energy generation in the area.
Would not result in any significant environmental impacts?	As detailed in Sections I through XXI of this Initial Study, no unavoidable or unmitigable significant impacts were identified. Where significant impacts have been identified, mitigation measures are proposed, that when implemented, would reduce the impact level to less than significant. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in a residual significant impact.

Source: County of Imperial 2016

County of Imperial Land Use Ordinance. Implementation of the project would require the approval of a CUP by the County to allow for the construction and operation of the proposed solar energy facility with an integrated BESS. The project parcel is currently zoned as A-2. Pursuant to Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 8, the following uses are permitted in the A-2 zone subject to approval of a CUP from Imperial County:

> *j) Battery Storage Facility (must be connected to an existing electrical power generation plant such as solar, geothermal, wind, natural gas, or other renewable energy generator, as an accessory unit to said power plant). The maximum allowance of battery shall be in a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.*
>
> *pp) Major facilities relating to the generation and transmission of electrical energy, provided such facilities are not, under State or Federal law, to be approved exclusively by an agency or agencies of the State and/or Federal governments and provided that such facilities shall be approved subsequent to coordination and review with the Imperial Irrigation District for electrical matters. The maximum allowance of battery shall be in a ratio of 2 to 1 compared to solar.*

Therefore, with approval of the CUP, the proposed project would not conflict with the County of Imperial Land Use Ordinance and no impact would occur.

XII Mineral Resources				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan, or other land use plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** Construction of the proposed project would not result in any impacts to known mineral resources or mineral resource recovery sites. The nearest active mines for mineral resources are open pit sand and gravel located approximately 7 miles to the southwest of the project site (California DOC 2023). Additionally, the proposed project would not preclude future mineral resource exploration throughout the project site. No impact would occur.

b) **No Impact.** As noted in Response XII. a). implementation of the proposed project would not result in the loss of availability of locally-important mineral resources or mineral resource recovery sites. Additionally, the proposed project would not preclude future mineral resource exploration throughout the project site. No impact would occur.

XIII Noise				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project result in:				
a) Generation of a substantial temporary or permanent increase in ambient noise levels in the vicinity of the project in excess of standards established in the local general plan or noise ordinance, or applicable standards of other agencies?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project prepared by SWCA. This report is provided as Appendix H of this Initial Study.

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report assesses the potential change in the current noise levels resulting from implementation of the proposed project. Both construction and operation of the project would generate noise and ground-borne vibration.

Existing Conditions

The project site is not located in proximity to noise sensitive receptors, such as schools, hospitals, daycare centers, or long-term care establishments. The closest noise sensitive area (NSA) is the Ocotillo RV Resort (herein referred to as NSA 1), approximately 2,700 feet west of the project site. The nearest residence is approximately 5,800 feet southwest of the project site (herein referred to as NSA 2).

To determine the baseline or ambient sound levels experienced near the project site and at the closest noise sensitive areas NSAs, long-term sound monitoring was conducted from July 12 to July 13, 2023 and short-term sound monitoring was conducted on July 18, 2023, to document the acoustic environment in the area surrounding the proposed project.

One long-term and three short-term noise monitoring locations were selected to provide the existing ambient noise levels near and at the project site (see Figure 3 of *Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project*). The noise levels ranged between 50.8 and 78.4 dBA L_{eq}. 50.8 dBA is used to represent the ambient noise levels at NSAs, as this would produce the most conservative results that would maximize project related impacts.

Construction

The evaluation of potential noise and vibration impacts associated with project construction was based on the project's construction schedule, phasing, and equipment assumptions that were provided by the applicant. The project site would consist of different activities undertaken in phases through the operation of the project. For this report, project construction is divided into four phases based on the types of construction equipment required and workload: 1) site preparation/grading; 2) trenching/interconnection construction; 3) substation/switching station construction; and 4) solar panel array installation.

The County of Imperial General Plan's Construction Noise Standards provides restrictions on construction noise. To assess whether the project might produce significant construction noise levels at external sensitive receiver sites, the construction noise level criteria from these standards were used.

According to the County of Imperial General Plan's Construction Noise Standards, a daytime exterior construction noise level of 75 dBA L_{eq} is deemed the threshold for noise-sensitive residential zones. Construction impacts were compared to this threshold.

On-Site Construction Noise

Construction activities associated with the project are anticipated to last approximately 18 months, with completion anticipated in 2026. During this time, temporary increases in noise levels at the project site are expected to occur due to the operations of various large construction equipment within the project site.

Estimates of noise from the construction of the project are based on a roster of the maximum amount of construction equipment used on a given day. Table 11 of the *Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project* presents the roster of expected noise generating construction equipment be used for construction of the project and their associated noise levels of 50 feet.

The approximate noise generated by construction equipment to be used at the project site has been conservatively calculated based on an estimated project construction equipment roster anticipated to be used at the construction site, without consideration of further attention due to atmospheric interference or intervening structures.

To analyze the project's potential noise impacts, the average 1-hour L_{eq} construction noise level generated during each phase of construction was estimated at the analyzed receptor based on its distance to the construction phase activity.

The highest construction noise levels at each of the analyzed monitoring locations were estimated based on the reference noise levels shown in Table 11 of the *Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project* and the distance of each analyzed monitor from the project's construction activities. To more accurately characterize the noise associated with each construction phase, a usage factor for each type of equipment was used to represent those periods when equipment is not being operated under full-power conditions. Also, the noise levels were estimated to present a conservative impact analysis, assuming that all of the pieces of construction equipment are operating simultaneously. Furthermore, the model assumes that construction noise is constant when in all actuality construction activities are periodic and change throughout the day.

The estimated construction noise levels that would be experienced by the nearby sensitive receptor are shown below in Table 14.

Table 15. Estimated Construction Noise Levels at Nearby Sensitive Receptors

Receptor	Measured Daytime Ambient Noise Levels, Leq (dBA)	Estimated Construction Noise Levels by Construction Phases (Ambient plus Construction), Leq (dBA)				Significance Threshold, Leq (dBA)
		Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	
NSA 1	50.8	53.6	52.3	46.7	52.3	75.0

Source: Appendix H of this Initial Study

As shown in Table 14, the highest estimated construction-related noise levels that could be experienced by nearby sensitive receptors would be 53.6 dBA Leq at sensitive receptor NSA 1. The analyzed sensitive receptors near the project site would not be exposed to construction-only noise levels exceeding 75dBA Leq. Therefore, construction noise impacts would be less than significant.

Off-Site Construction Noise

Noise levels would be generated from construction-related traffic associated with worker trips and haul-tuck trips on roadways. Construction trucks would access the project site from SR78.

It is anticipated that during the construction period, daily vehicle traffic at the project site will be mainly composed of various types of vehicles, including workers' cars, delivery trucks, and construction equipment. The most frequent trips will be those of construction workers commuting to and from the site.

The project site is located in an undeveloped area adjacent to SR 78, where the predominant traffic is interstate. Unlike typical urban environments, the area doesn't exhibit standard commute periods.

It is anticipated that during each construction phase, approximately 100 one-way workers trips, two one-way vendor trips and 16 one-way on-site haul truck trips would occur on a daily basis. This level of traffic increase is not expected to result in significant increases in noise and that the estimated noise levels generated by construction off-site traffic would be below the existing daytime ambient noise level at the noise sensitive receptors along the haul routes. Therefore, a less than significant impact would occur.

Operations

On-site noise levels would be generated by stationary noise sources such as mechanical equipment) (inverters, transformers, and BESS enclosures). Impacts from the operation of the mechanical equipment were analyzed using the SoundPLAN Essential.

The County of Imperial General Plan mandates that noise levels from stationary sources should not surpass 50 dBA in residential areas between 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. and 45 dBA between 10 p.m. to 7 a.m. According to the County of Imperial General Plan, when the ambient noise level is equal to or exceeds the Property Line noise standard, the increase of the existing or proposed noise shall not exceed 3 dB Leq. For the purposes of this analysis, because the measured ambient noise level is in excess of the Property Line noise standard, the 3 dBA Leq increase in noise was used as the significance threshold to assess project impacts.

Table 15 represents the estimated noise levels at the evaluated off-site receptors from the operation of the proposed mechanical noise sources.

Table 16. Estimated Noise Levels at the Nearest Receptor

NSA	Existing Daytime Ambient Noise Levels, Leq (dBA)	Estimated Noise Levels from Equipment Operation, Leq (dBA)	Ambient plus Project Noise Levels, Leq (dBA)	Increase in Noise at NSA (dBA)	Significance Threshold (Noise Increase at NSA in dBA)
Seville 5 Contribution					
NSA 1	50.8	37.8	51.0	0.2	3
NSA 2	50.8	41.5	51.3	0.5	3
Total Contribution (Seville 4 and 5)					
NSA 1	50.8	39.3	51.1	0.3	3
NSA 2	50.8	42.7	51.4	0.6	3

Source: Appendix H of this Initial Study

As shown in Table 15, the estimated noise level from the operation of the proposed mechanical equipment is estimated to be 37.8 dBA at NSA 1. The estimated noise level from the operation of the proposed mechanical equipment is estimated to be 41.5 dBA at NSA 2. Consequently, the estimated noise levels would be below the existing daytime ambient noise levels (50.8 dBA) and below the 3 dBA Leq increase significance threshold. Therefore, operation of the proposed project would not result in a significant increase in noise levels at the nearby off-site sensitive uses, and a less than significant impact would occur.

Noise levels were also estimated for the proposed sources from the Seville 4 solar project located directly south of Seville 5 and will be connected during construction. Operational noise levels from both projects operating simultaneously are estimated to be 39.3 and 42.7 at NSA 1 and NSA 2 respectively. Noise levels at NSA 1 are expected to be 0.3 dBA higher than current ambient levels as a result of operations at both solar projects. Noise levels at NSA 2 are expected to increase by 0.6 dBA. These values indicate that the projects will not result in a noticeable difference in the sound levels at the closest NSA's to the projects. The projects would remain in compliance with all applicable ordinances, thus, impacts are considered less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** Operation of heavy construction equipment at the project site would generate ground-bone vibrations that could affect structures immediately adjacent to the project site or could also cause an annoyance to people at those locations.

Construction

Construction activities that would have the potential to generate levels of ground-borne vibration within the project site include mobile equipment activities. Project vibration impacts were estimated using the vibration source level of construction equipment and the construction vibration assessment methodology published by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA).

In the absence of specific County level impact thresholds, the FTA's thresholds have been adopted for this analysis. For building damage, the FTA specifies that vibration levels should not exceed 0.2 inch per second when measured at or beyond the property boundary. As such, in assessing the vibration levels resulting from the project's operation and construction, a PPV vibration standard of 0.2 inches per second is applied. For human annoyance, FTA specifies that vibration levels should not exceed 80 VdB.

According to the *Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report for the Seville 5 Solar Project,* the estimated vibration level generated by construction equipment at the project site during

project construction would be 51.5 VdB, which is below FTA's human annoyance significance threshold of 80 VdB. The estimated vibration level generated by construction equipment at the project site during project construction would be 0.0023 inches per second, which is below FTA's building damage significance threshold of 0.2 inches per second.

Operations

Operation of the project would not involve any sources capable of generating perceptible levels of vibration in the surrounding area. There would be no permanent source of potential to change vibration levels, except during unscheduled maintenance or repair activities, which would be similar to construction activities. Therefore, impacts related to operational ground-borne noise and vibration would be less than significant.

c) **No Impact.** The project site is not located within two miles of a public airport. The nearest airports are the Ocotillo Wells Airport located approximately 7 miles northwest of the project site and the Salton Sea Airport located approximately 9.61 miles northeast of the project site. The proposed project would not expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels and no impact would occur.

XIV Population and Housing				
Environmental Issue Area:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Would the project:				
a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (e.g., by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (e.g., through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not induce unplanned population growth. The proposed project involves the construction and operation of a solar energy facility and BESS within a predominantly undeveloped, vacant area of Imperial County. No development of new roads or infrastructure is proposed that would introduce new populations to the project site. The proposed project does not include the extension of roads. Vehicular access to the project site will be from an existing unpaved private road that intersects SR 78. This road is currently used to access the existing solar facilities to the southeast (Seville 1, Seville 2 and Titan I Solar) (Figure 2). This private road would provide a direct entrance to the project site at its northeast corner. No impact would occur.

b) **No Impact.** No residential units are on the project site that would require relocation. Therefore, the proposed project would not displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. No impact would occur.

XV Public Services				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:				
i. Fire Protection?	☐	☐	☒	☐
ii. Police Protection?	☐	☐	☐	☒
iii. Schools?	☐	☐	☐	☒
iv. Parks?	☐	☐	☐	☒
v. Other public facilities?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

ai) **Less than Significant Impact.** Fire protection and emergency medical services for the project site would be provided by the Imperial County Fire Department. The project has the potential to increase response times, as energy storage facilities (i.e., the proposed BESS), have the potential to create hazards related to risk of explosion, flammable gases, toxic fumes, water-reactive materials, electrical shock, corrosives, and chemical burns. Utility-scale BESS requires specialized and reliable equipment to perform firefighting operations to NFPA recommendations, OSHA requirements, and ICFD standards. In order to maintain adequate level of service, the Imperial County Fire Department has identified specific conditions of approval that will be incorporated into the CUP for the BESS, including, but not limited to access roads, water supply requirements, automatic fire detection and suppression systems, preparation of a Hazard Mitigation Analysis, emergency operation plan, emergency evacuation plan and cost recovery. With adherence to the conditions of approval as part of the CUP, the proposed project would not result in a need for fire facility expansion, which in turn, would create a significant impact to the environment, and a less than significant impact is identified.

aii) **No Impact.** Police protection services to the project site would be provided by the Imperial County Sheriff's Department. The nearest station to the project site is the Salton City Substation located at 2101 S Marina Drive approximately 12miles to the northeast. The proposed project would not require police services during construction or operation and maintenance beyond routine patrols and response. Construction and operation of the proposed project would not induce growth in the area surrounding the project site that would result in the permanent, and increased need of police protection services. No impact would occur.

aiii) **No Impact.** The proposed project does not include the development of residential land uses that would result in an increase in population or student generation. Construction is

estimated to take approximately 12-18 months. The number of construction workers is not expected to require a substantial number of workers. Furthermore, no full-time employees are required to operate the project. Construction of the proposed project would not result in an increase in student population within the Imperial County's School District since it is anticipated that construction workers would commute in during construction operations. Furthermore, no full-time employees are required to operate the project. It is anticipated that maintenance of the project will be minimal to perform periodic visual inspections and minor repairs. The proposed project would not result in an increase in student population within the Imperial County's School District. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on Imperial County schools.

aiv) **No Impact.** Construction is estimated to take approximately 12-18 months. Construction of the project is not expected to require a substantial number of workers Furthermore, no full-time employees are required to operate the project. It is anticipated that maintenance of the project will be minimal to perform periodic visual inspections and minor repairs. Substantial permanent increases in population that would adversely affect local parks is not anticipated. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on parks.

av) **Impact.** Construction is estimated to take approximately 12-18 months. Construction of the project is not expected to require a substantial number of workers Furthermore, no full-time employees are required to operate the project. It is anticipated that maintenance of the project will be minimal to perform periodic visual inspections and minor repairs. Substantial permanent increases in population that would adversely affect libraries and other public facilities (such as post offices) is not anticipated. Therefore, the proposed project would have no impact on other public facilities such as post offices and libraries.

XVI Recreation				
Environmental Issue Area:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Would the project:				
a) Would the project increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities, which might have an adverse physical effect on the environment?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not increase the use of existing neighborhood parks and regional parks or other recreational facilities. The proposed project would not induce new populations that would result in the substantial physical deterioration of recreational facilities. No impact would occur.

b) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities. The proposed project would not induce new populations that would require new recreational facilities. No impact would occur.

XVII Transportation				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Conflict with a program plan, ordinance or policy addressing the circulation system, including transit, roadway, bicycle and pedestrian facilities?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Conflict with or be inconsistent with CEQA Guidelines section 15064.3, subdivision (b)?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Result in inadequate emergency access?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

The following information is summarized from the *Transportation Generation Memorandum – Seville 5 Project* prepared by Kittelson & Associates, Inc. This report is provided as Appendix I of this Initial Study.

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The *Transportation Generation Memorandum* prepared for the project analyzes the potential transportation-related impacts during project construction and operations. The following is a discussion of the project's impacts on the roadway network, transit, bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

Project Trip Generation

Construction is estimated to take approximately 12 to 18 months with project operation starting in early 2028. Project-related trip estimates were calculated to assess the project's traffic impact on local roads during construction and operation.

Construction

It is anticipated that daily vehicle traffic would be primarily comprised of worker's passenger cars/light trucks, worker shuttles, delivery trucks, dump trucks, waste hauling trucks, crane equipment vehicles, and portable toilet trucks during the construction period. The project would have between 15 and 25 construction workers onsite, depending on construction activities. To be conservative, it was assumed 25 workers will arrive during AM and PM peak hours.

The trip generation estimate reflects a worst-case condition with the maximum number of construction workers on site and the anticipated maximum heavy duty truck activity during the construction period. During construction, the number of daily trips would be 50 automobiles and 26 trucks, totaling 76. When converted to PCE, the number of daily trips would be 102.

Operation

After the completion of construction, the project would be remotely controlled, eliminating the need for on-site employees. Primary security monitoring will also be conducted remotely. However, security personnel will perform unscheduled rounds and respond to alarms or fence breaches when necessary. The facility will not be accessible to the public, and access will be infrequent and limited to authorized personnel.

To maintain the power generation efficiency of the PV modules, periodic washing is planned twice a year to remove dust. During this period, workers will be on-site for minor repairs, panel washing, equipment inspection, and area maintenance. Water will be sourced from an on-site well, but water trucks are included in the post-construction trip generation to be conservative if the on-site well is unavailable on a given day.

During operation of the project, the number of daily trips would be 12 automobiles. When converted to PCE the number of daily trips would remain 12.

Roadway Network Impacts

The Imperial County Traffic Study and Report Policy Section C.1.b, states that projects that generate no more than 200 vehicle trips during peak hours are not required to have a detailed LOS analysis. Since the total number of trips generated do not exceed 200 peak hour trips, a detailed LOS analysis is not required for both project construction and operations.

As previously discussed, the project would generate a negligible amount of trips during long-term operations, as it would be operated mostly remotely. No long-term impacts to the circulation system would occur as the project would generate a nominal amount of traffic to the circulation system.

Based on these considerations, the potential for the proposed project to cause an increase in traffic to the existing traffic load and capacity of the street system would be negligible and this is considered a less than significant impact.

Transit, Bicycle, and Pedestrian Facilities Impacts

There are no transit services, paved sidewalks, nor dedicated bicycle lanes in the project area. Therefore, the proposed project would result in no impact to transit, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** Section 15064.3(b) of the CEQA Guidelines provides guidance on determining the significance of transportation impacts and focuses on the use of vehicle miles traveled (VMT), which is defined as the amount and distance of automobile travel associated with a project.

Imperial County has not yet formally developed guidelines or adopted significance criteria or technical methodologies for VMT analysis. Therefore, the "Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA," prepared by the State of California Office of Planning and Research (OPR) in December 2018, was the primary source used to assess the need for project-specific VMT analysis. The Technical Advisory identifies screening thresholds for land use projects to determine if a detailed VMT analysis is needed. To be screened out of a detailed VMT analysis, a project or project component would need to satisfy at least one of the VMT screening criteria. A summary of OPR's screening criteria and determinations are listed below:

- **Small Project Size:** Projects generating less than 110 trips per day may be considered to have an insignificant impact on VMT.
- **Projects Within Transit Priority Areas:** Projects, including residential, retail, and office projects, as well as mixed-use projects within a ½ mile of an existing major transit stop or along a high-quality transit corridor, are generally presumed to have a minor impact on VMT.

- **Local-Serving Retail:** Projects categorized as local-serving retail are presumed to have an insignificant impact on VMT.
- **Redevelopment Projects Resulting in Net VMT Reduction:** Redevelopment projects that would decrease VMT, meaning the proposed land use generates less VMT than the existing use, may be considered to have an insignificant impact on VMT.
- **Affordable Housing:** The OPR's technical advisory provides special considerations for affordable housing. Projects that consist of 100% affordable housing in infill locations are presumed to have a minor impact on VMT.

As discussed in Response XVII a) above, the proposed project would generate up to 100 and 24 net new daily primary vehicle trips (non-truck trips) during construction and operation, respectively. Therefore, the proposed project meets the small project size screening criteria because it would generate less than 110 trips per day. Therefore, the project screens out as a small project during both construction and operations and is expected to result in a less than significant VMT impact due to low long-term operational traffic.

c) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project does not include any alteration to the existing public road network. Vehicular access to the project site will be from an existing unpaved private road that intersects SR 78. This road is currently used to access the existing solar facilities to the southeast (Seville 1, Seville 2 and Titan I Solar) (Figure 2). This private road would provide a direct entrance to the project site at its northeast corner. Therefore, a less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** Vehicular access to the project site will be from an existing unpaved private road that intersects SR 78. This road is currently used to access the existing solar facilities to the southeast (Seville 1, Seville 2 and Titan I Solar) (Figure 2). This private road would provide a direct entrance to the project site at its northeast corner. The solar arrays would be separated from each other and the perimeter security fence by at least 20-foot-wide interior roads to provide access to all areas for maintenance and emergency vehicles. Therefore, the proposed project would not result in inadequate emergency access and this impact is considered less than significant.

XVIII Tribal Cultural Resources				
Environmental Issue Area:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Would the project cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a tribal cultural resource defined in Public Resources Code section 21074 as either a site, feature, place, cultural landscape that is geographically defined in terms of the size and scope of the landscape, sacred place, or object with cultural value to a California Native American tribe, and that is:				
a) Listed or eligible for listing in the California Register of Historical Resources, or in a local register of historical resources as defined in Public Resources Code section 5020.1(k)?	☐	☒	☐	☐
b) A resource determined by the lead agency, in its discretion and supported by substantial evidence, to be significant pursuant to criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1. In applying the criteria set forth in subdivision (c) of Public Resources Code Section 5024.1, the lead agency shall consider the significance of the resource to a California Native American tribe?	☐	☒	☐	☐

Impact Analysis

a-b) No tribal cultural resources have been identified within the project site. Construction activities associated with the proposed project will include ground disturbing actions that could impact potential NRHP/CRHR eligible resources and thus, to the maximum extent feasible, the project applicant will design the project to avoid these resources. This potential impact is considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce potential impacts to a level less than significant. Further, given the likelihood of precontact archaeological sites located in the project area, there is potential for buried precontact archaeological sites to exist in the project area. Therefore, the possibility remains that unanticipated subsurface discoveries may arise during project construction. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce potential impacts to a level less than significant. Additionally, although the potential for encountering subsurface human remains within the project site is low, there remains a possibility that human remains are present beneath the ground surface, and that such remains could be exposed during construction. The potential to encounter human remains is considered a significant impact. Mitigation Measure CR-3 would ensure that the potential impact on previously unknown human remains does not rise to the level of significance pursuant to CEQA.

XIX Utilities and Service Systems				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
Would the project:				
a) Require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water, wastewater treatment or storm water drainage, electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities, the construction or relocation of which could cause significant environmental effects?	☐	☐	☒	☐
b) Have sufficient water supplies available to serve the project and reasonably foreseeable future development during normal, dry and multiple dry years?	☐	☐	☒	☐
c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider, which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?	☐	☐	☐	☒
d) Generate solid waste in excess of State or local standards, or in excess of the capacity of local infrastructure, or otherwise impair the attainment of solid waste reduction goals?	☐	☐	☒	☐
e) Comply with federal, state, and local management and reduction statutes and regulations related to solid waste?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

a) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project does not currently contain any public utilities or services such as water, wastewater treatment, stormwater drainage, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities.

The project's water supply would be provided by groundwater from two private wells owned by the project proponent. An existing well located in the southeast corner of the parcel immediately below the project site would be used for construction needs. The second well, located in the south-central portion of the project site, would be used for operation and maintenance purposes. The proposed project would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water facilities.

The proposed project would not require the relocation, expansion, or construction of new storm drainage facilities because the proposed solar facility would not generate a significant increase in the amount of impervious surfaces that would increase runoff during storm events and exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems. Water from

solar panel washing would continue to percolate through the ground, as a majority of the surfaces within the project site would remain pervious.

The wastewater generated during construction would be contained within portable toilet facilities and disposed of at an approved site. The minimal volume of wastewater generated during construction would not require the relocation expansion, or construction of wastewater treatment facilities.

Further, no habitable structures (e.g. housing or O&M buildings) are proposed on the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new natural gas facilities.

Based on these considerations, a less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

b) **Less than Significant Impact.** A detailed discussion of the project's water demand and potential impacts on water supply is discussed in Response X. b) above. During the construction period of up to approximately 12 to 18 months, the project would use up to approximately 112.5 AF of water for construction activities. Operational water demands, which include system washing and operation of the proposed on-site facilities, would total approximately 7.5 AFY. As discussed in Response X. b) above, the Ocotillo-Clark Valley Groundwater Basin has a recharge rate of 1,100 AFY, and the project demand has a projected peak demand of up to 112.5 AF for construction purposes and 7.5 AFY for operational purposes. The net water balance supply for normal, single dry, and multiple dry years is sufficient to meet project purposes.

The project's water supply would be provided by groundwater from two private wells owned by the project proponent. An existing well located in the southeast corner of the parcel immediately below the project site would be used for construction needs. The second well, located in the south-central portion of the project site, would be used for operation and maintenance purposes. Water demand projections in the project area generally account for solar energy developments, such as the project. Further, as discussed in Response X. b) above, water supply availability projections generally indicate that sufficient water supplies are available to meet projected water demands for the project. This is considered a less than significant impact.

c) **No Impact.** The proposed project would not generate wastewater that would need to be treated by a wastewater treatment facility. On-site wastewater needs will be accommodated using portable toilets that would be removed from the project site once construction is complete. As a result, no impact would occur.

d) **Less than Significant Impact.** Solid waste generation would be minor during construction and operation of the proposed project. During decommissioning of the project, a collection and recycling program will be executed to promote recycling of project components and minimize disposal in landfills.

There are several solid waste facilities within Imperial County and solid waste will be disposed of using a locally-licensed waste hauling service, most likely Allied Waste. Trash would likely be hauled to the Salton City Solid Waste Site (13-AA-0011) located in Salton City. The Salton City Solid Waste Site has approximately 62,974,488 cubic yards of remaining capacity and is estimated to remain in operation through 2038 (CalRecycle 2019). Therefore, there is ample landfill capacity in the County to receive the minor amount of solid waste generated by construction and operation of the proposed project.

The project will be required to comply with state and local requirements for waste reduction and recycling; including the 1989 California Integrated Waste Management Act and the 1991 California Solid Waste Reuse and Recycling Access Act of 1991. Also, conditions of the conditional use permit will contain provisions for recycling and diversion of Imperial County construction waste policies. Therefore, a less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

e) **Less than Significant Impact.** The proposed project would comply with all applicable statutes and regulations related to solid waste. As discussed in Response XIX. d) above, solid waste generated by the proposed project is expected to be minimal. As a result, this impact is considered less than significant.

XX Wildfire				
Environmental Issue Area:	Potentially Significant Impact	Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:				
a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	☐	☐	☐	☒

Impact Analysis

a) **No Impact.** According to the Fire Hazard Severity Zone Viewer provided by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the project site is not located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high hazard severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2022). Therefore, the proposed project would not substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. No impact is identified for this issue area.

b) **No Impact.** The project site is not located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high hazard severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2022). Therefore, the proposed project would not exacerbate wildfire risks. No impact is identified for this issue area.

c) **Less than Significant Impact.** Fire protection and emergency medical services in the area are provided by the Imperial County Fire Department. The project site is not located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high hazard severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2022). Further, the proposed project is located in an area of Imperial County which has a generally low potential for a major fire (County of Imperial 2016).

The project involves the installation of solar PV panels, an on-site substation and switchyard, BESS, inverters, transformers, and an aboveground gen-tie line. To accommodate emergency access, PV panels would be spaced to maintain proper clearance. Proposed

project facilities would be designed, constructed, and operated in accordance with applicable fire protection, CPUC safety standards, and other environmental, health, and safety requirements. Further, water for emergency fire suppression is proposed to be provided by the proposed on-site groundwater well. Therefore, operation and maintenance would not affect the ability of fire personnel to respond to fires or exacerbate fire risk and would continue to be adequately supported by the existing fire protection services. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue area.

d) **No Impact.** The project site is not located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high hazard severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2022). Additionally, the proposed project would not expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes. No impact is identified for this issue area and no further analysis is warranted.

XXI Mandatory Findings of Significance				
Environmental Issue Area:	**Potentially Significant Impact**	**Less than Significant with Mitigation Incorporated**	**Less Than Significant Impact**	**No Impact**
Would the project:				
a) Does the project have the potential to substantially degrade the quality of the environment, substantially reduce the habitat of a fish or wildlife species, cause a fish or wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, threaten to eliminate a plant or animal community, substantially reduce the number or restrict the range of a rare or endangered plant or animal or eliminate important examples of the major periods of California history or prehistory?	☐	☒	☐	☐
b) Does the project have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable ("Cumulatively considerable" means that the incremental effects of a project are considerable when viewed in connection with the effects of past projects, the effects of other current projects, and the effects of probable future projects)?	☐	☒	☐	☐
c) Does the project have environmental effects, which will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Impact Analysis

a) Less Than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.

Biological Resources

Special-Status Plants

As described in Response IV. a) above, the results of the habitat assessment and rare plant survey determined that 15 special-status plant species were determined to occur or have the potential to occur in the project area. These species include Salton milk-vetch, Harwood's milk-vetch, Borrego milk-vetch, gravel milk-vetch, Peirson's pincushion, California ditaxis, Abrams' spurge, Newberry's velvet-mallow, ribbed cryptantha, winged cryptantha, Torrey's box-thorn, brown turbans, Thurber's pilostyles, desert unicorn-plant, and Orcutt's woody-aster. Impacts to these species could be considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-1 through BIO-5 would reduce potential impacts on special-status plant species to a level less than significant.

Special-Status Wildlife

As described in Response IV. a) above, nine species have the potential to occur within the project site. These species include: Flat-tailed Horned Lizard, Golden Eagle, Burrowing Owl, Mountain Plover, Loggerhead Shrike, LeConte's thrasher, Palm Springs Pocket Mouse, American Badger, and Desert Kit Fox. Impacts to these species could be considered significant. Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-4, and BIO-6 through BIO-24 would reduce potential impacts on special-status wildlife species to a level less than significant.

The project site has suitable nesting habitat for several special-status species and common bird species. The trees on-site provide suitable nesting habitat for raptors and other tree-nesting species. Impacts to nesting avian species could be considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures BIO-2 through BIO-4, BIO-6, BIO-9, BIO-23 and BIO-24 would reduce potential impacts on nesting avian species to a level less than significant.

Cultural Resources (including Tribal Cultural Resources)

As described in Response V. a) above, the results of the due diligence study (Appendix E of this Initial Study) identified 18 archaeological sites and six isolated finds in the project area. Although these resources were preliminary documented during the survey effort, these resources will need to be revisited and fully recorded on appropriate DPR 523 forms. Any archeological sites that cannot be avoided by the proposed project shall be evaluated for the CRHR. Construction activities associated with the proposed project will include ground disturbing actions that could impact potential NRHP/CRHR eligible resources. To the maximum extent feasible, the project applicant will design the project to avoid these resources. However, if avoidance is not feasible, the proposed project has the potential to impact these resources and cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource pursuant to §15064.5. This potential impact is considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce the potential impact to a level less than significant.

As described in Response V. b) above, there is a potential that ground disturbing activities during construction could impact potentially significant archaeological resources. In addition, the soil types present within the project area and immediate vicinity are undifferentiated alluvial sand, gravel, silt, and clay of valley areas and Cahuilla Beds (Qa-Qc). Given the likelihood of precontact archaeological sites located in the project area, there is potential for buried precontact archaeological sites to exist in the project area. Therefore, there remains a possibility that unanticipated subsurface discoveries may arise during project construction. This potential impact is considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measures CR-1 and CR-2 would reduce potential impacts to a level less than significant.

As described in Response V. c) above, the potential for encountering subsurface human remains within the project site is low, there remains a possibility that human remains are present beneath the ground surface, and that such remains could be exposed during construction. This potential impact is considered significant. Implementation of Mitigation Measure CR-3 would ensure that the potential impact on previously unknown human remains does not rise to a level of significance pursuant to CEQA.

Geology and Soils

As described in Response VII. f) above, the project site is located in an area underlain by high paleontological sensitivity. Impacts on any surface or near-surface level paleontological resources may occur because of grading and disturbance of the area. Even relatively shallow excavations in the Lake Cahuilla beds exposed during construction in the project site may encounter buried fossils. Implementation of Mitigation Measures GEO-1 through GEO-5 would reduce impacts associated with the disturbance of paleontological resources to a level less than significant.

b) **Less than Significant Impact with Mitigation Incorporated.** Based on the analysis contained in this Initial Study, the proposed project would not result in significant impacts to aesthetics, agricultural and forestry resources, air quality, energy, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation and traffic, utilities and service systems, and wildfire.

The proposed project would have potential impacts that are significant on the following resources areas: biological resources, cultural resources, geology and soils, and tribal cultural resources. However, implementation of mitigation measures would ensure potential impacts are reduced to less than significant levels. The proposed project would incrementally contribute to cumulative impacts for projects occurring within the vicinity of the project. However, compliance with the mitigation measures would ensure that no residually significant impacts would result with implementation of the project either directly or indirectly. In the absence of residually significant impacts, the incremental accumulation of effects would not be cumulatively considerable. Therefore, a less than significant is identified for this issue area.

c) **Less Than Significant Impact.** Based on the analysis contained in this Initial Study, the proposed project would not cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly. Any effects related to construction of the project would be temporary and short-term and would not result in any long-term or permanent effects on human beings. This is considered a less than significant impact.

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List of Preparers

This Initial Study was prepared for the Imperial County Planning and Development Services Department by HDR. The following professionals participated in its preparation:

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- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Technical Report
- Aquatic Resources Delineation Report
- Biological Resources Technical Report
- Cultural Resources Constraints Analysis
- Energy Assessment
- Noise and Ground Vibration Technical Report
- Paleontological Resources Technical Report
- Visual Assessment and Glare Analysis
- Water Supply Assessment

Kittelson and Associates, Inc.

- Trip Generation Memorandum

Findings

This is to advise that the County of Imperial, acting as the lead agency, has conducted an Initial Study to determine if the project may have a significant effect on the environment and is proposing this Negative Declaration based upon the following findings:

☐ The Initial Study shows that there is no substantial evidence that the project may have a significant effect on the environment and a NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

☒ The Initial Study identifies potentially significant effects but:

(1) Proposals made or agreed to by the applicant before this proposed Mitigated Negative Declaration was released for public review would avoid the effects or mitigate the effects to a point where clearly no significant effects would occur.

(2) There is no substantial evidence before the agency that the project may have a significant effect on the environment.

(3) Mitigation measures are required to ensure all potentially significant impacts are reduced to levels of insignificance.

A MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION will be prepared.

If adopted, the Negative Declaration means that an Environmental Impact Report will not be required. Reasons to support this finding are included in the attached Initial Study. The project file and all related documents are available for review at the County of Imperial, Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243 (442) 265-1736.

NOTICE

The public is invited to comment on the proposed Negative Declaration during the review period.

4/24/2025 for

Date of Determination Jim Minnick, Director of Planning & Development Services

The Applicant hereby acknowledges and accepts the results of the Environmental Evaluation Committee (EEC) and hereby agrees to implement all Mitigation Measures, if applicable, as outlined in the MMRP.

Applicant Signature

6-16-2025
Date