

Pg. 6 (CAllen 2-25-2015)

39) Pg 16 of the RETE mentions eminent domain. This document should say that the County will do all it can to prevent eminent domain from being used due to the harm it could do to its residents and businesses.
40) Pg. 17 of the RETE Aesthetics "The visual character of Imperial County also Includes Comment

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- 40) Pg. 17 of the KETE Aesthetics "The visual character of Imperial County also includes agricultural areas, urban areas and areas of solar development." The words areas of solar development should be removed from this section. Solar should not be considered a dominant part of our visual character.
- 41) Objective 1.2 should say the goal is to prohibit solar on farmground.
- 42) Objective 1.6 should use stronger word " Encourage " and replace with " Require"
- 43) I am pleased to see the inclusion of Objective 3.1 preserving IID Balancing authority and rate making authority. This is in the long term best interest of Imperial County.
- 44) Objective 3.4 Why let our County be so negatively impacted just to "offset the operational costs to the county" The costs should be sufficient enough to much more than offset County costs for the proposed project.
- 45) Objective 4.1 How is prioritizing the Salton Sea exposed seabed for renewable energy development compatible with restoration of the Sea? More details should be given here.
- 46) Objective 5.1 Promoting pilot projects for testing could lead to residents feeling as though they are being used as guinea pigs.
- 47) Section B Assumptions pg 31 " an adequate and satisfactory source of water will be available for renewable energy delopment. " With a drought and dwindling water supplies, how can this be assumed?

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Response to Comment Letter #18: Carolyn Allen

<u>Comment 18-1:</u> Thank you for your comments on the Imperial County General Plan *Renewable Energy and Transmission Element* Update Draft PEIR. The Draft PEIR presents a reasonable range of alternatives and is consistent with CEQA. The County developed three build alternatives in the early planning stages of the proposed Project that were presented in the Baseline Environmental Inventory Report. After careful consideration, one alternative was eliminated because it did not offer any advantage over the two build alternatives that were carried forward. The proposed Project represents the most restrictive of all considered alternatives, while the DRECP Preferred Alternative presented the largest overlay zone map.

A distributive generation alternative was not developed for the proposed Project because it would not meet the goals and objectives of the Element update. While the County supports development of distributive generation facilities such as rooftop solar, a project alternative focused solely on distributive generation would not be capable of generating the amount of energy needed to meet project goals and objectives. Distributed generation involves the development of a large number of geographically distributed small solar PV systems within existing developed areas, typically on the rooftops of residential and other facilities. Distributed generation is generally available for use on-site and does not deliver electricity to the grid as a utility-scale solar facility does or contain an energy storage component. Because distributive generation does not deliver electricity to the grid and objectives of the Element update.

<u>Comment 18-2:</u> Renewable energy needs projected for the proposed Project were developed by the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT), which included the California Energy Commission (CEC) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM), in conjunction with renewable energy developers. The CEC is the state's primary energy policy and planning agency. The CEC was established by the State Legislature in 1974 and sets California energy policy through the following seven core responsibilities:

- Forecasting future energy needs;
- Promoting energy efficiency and conservation by setting the state's appliance and building energy efficiency standards;
- Supporting energy research that advances energy science and technology through research, development and demonstration projects;
- Developing renewable energy resources;
- Advancing alternative and renewable transportation fuels and technologies;
- Certifying thermal power plants 50 megawatts and larger; and
- Planning for and directing state response to energy emergencies.

As described in response to comment 18-1 above, distributive generation does not deliver electricity to the grid and does not contain an energy storage component, and therefore, a distributive generation alternative would not meet the goals and objectives of the Element update.

<u>Comment 18-3</u>: As described in response to comment 18-1 above, distributed generation is generally available for use on-site and does not deliver electricity to the grid as a utility-scale solar facility does or contain an energy storage component. Because distributive generation does not deliver electricity to the grid and does not contain an energy storage component, a distributive generation alternative would not meet the goals and objectives of the Element update.

The proposed overlay zones have been reduced based on comments provided by The BLM El Centro Field Office and conversion to a parcel-based overlay zone map since circulation of the Draft PEIR. Similarly, some locations originally designated as "Renewable Energy/Geothermal Overlay Zone" have been changed to "Geothermal Overlay Zone" based on comments provided by Federal and State agencies. These revisions have reduced the total acreage of Important Farmland within the proposed overlay zone from 92,113.80 acres to 72,811.97 acres. The greatest reduction occurred in the "Renewable Energy/Geothermal Overlay Zone", which resulted in a reduction of Important Farmland within this category from 41,782.98 acres to 30,136.12 acres. This reduction of acreage within the "Renewable Energy/Geothermal Overlay Zone" would reduce potential for impacts on Important Farmland since this category would allow for development of renewable energy technologies that are more impactful than what is allowed in the "Geothermal Overlay Zone." The revisions to the total acreage of Important Farmland within each overlay zone category are presented in Table 4.2-2 of the Final PEIR:

Farmland Classification	Geothermal Overlay Zone	Renewable Energy Overlay Zone	Renewable Energy/Geothermal Overlay Zone	Total Within Overlay Zone	
Prime Farmland	20,525.19 0.0	0.00	5,620.52	26,145.71	
	<u>17,548.10</u>	0.00	<u>3,886.23</u>	<u>21,434.34</u>	
Farmland of Statewide	27,832.34	0.00	18,174.06	46,006.41	
Importance	24,012.47		<u>14,601.12</u>	<u>38,613.59</u>	
Unique Farmland	74.68	0.00	305.08	379.75	
	<u>28.99</u>		<u>197.56</u>	<u>226.55</u>	
Farmland of Local	1,898.61	0.00	17,683.32	19,581.93	
Importance	1,086.29	0.00	<u>11,451.21</u>	<u>12,537.50</u>	
Total Important Farmland	50,332.82	0.00	41,782,98	92,113.80	
	<u>42,675.85</u>		<u>30,136.12</u>	<u>72,811.97</u>	
Source: California Department of Conservation, 2012					

Table 4.2-2: Important Farmland Within the Renewable Energy Overlay Zone

It should be noted that the proposed Project would not result in the elimination of farming on agricultural land located within the proposed overlay zones. The revised value of 72,811.97 acres of Important Farmland presented in the Final PEIR merely represents the total acreage of Important Farmland within the overlay zones. The actual conversion of farmland associated with future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would be less than this value of 72,811.97 acres of Important Farmland because development of the entire overlay zones would not be required to meet project objectives. The Final PEIR addresses this by stating the following:

"...It should be noted that significant impacts to agricultural resources may not occur to all <u>92,113.8072,811.97</u> acres of Important Farmland located within the boundaries of the Renewable Energy Overlay Zone Map. As described above, the boundaries of the

Renewable Energy Overlay Zone Map merely represent the areas that may be developed with renewable energy facilities, and substantial portions of the Renewable Energy Overlay Zone Map would not be affected. Furthermore, the majority of the potentially affected Important Farmland is located within the Geothermal Overlay Zone, which is limited to development of geothermal energy facilities. This limitation within this zone would minimize impacts to Important Farmland because geothermal energy facilities typically have fewer impacts to agricultural resources than solar energy facilities. Solar energy facility project footprints are typically much larger the geothermal facilities due to the wide open space of contiguous land needed to accommodate solar panels. Geothermal facility footprints on the other hand are limited to the power plant and, production wells, injection wells, which do not require as large an amount of land areapipelines, and access roads. The use of multiple well drilling pads and directional drilling limits the number of well pads and associated pipelines and roads. The Geothermal Overlay Zone also contains the majority of Prime Farmland and Farmland of Statewide Importance. Consequently, the development limitations of the Geothermal Overlay Zone would serve to minimize conversion of the most valuable Important Farmland categories..."

<u>Comment 18-4:</u> Thank you for expressing your support regarding the reduced footprint of the proposed overlay zone compared to the DREDP Development Focus Areas (DFAs). The locations of existing and proposed renewable energy facilities are presented on Figure 3.2-1 – Cumulative Projects of the Draft of PEIR. As described in response to comment 18-3 (above), the proposed Project would not result in the elimination of all farming on agricultural land located within the proposed overlay zones. The revised value of 72,811.97 acres of Important Farmland presented in the Final PEIR merely represents the total acreage of Important Farmland within the overlay zones. The actual conversion of farmland associated with future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would be less than this value of 72,811.97 acres of Important Farmland because development of the entire overlay zones would not be required to meet project objectives. Furthermore, the proposed Project would not result in any permanent impacts to agricultural resources. Agricultural resources converted to renewable energy resource uses would be temporary (e.g., solar) and would be restored to agricultural production per Mitigation Measure AG-1b: Reclamation/Decommissioning Plan and Security. Therefore, no farmland would be permanently lost due to renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project.

<u>Comment 18-5:</u> Potential impacts to farmland were analyzed consistent with CEQA by calculating the total acreage of Important Farmland located within the proposed overlay zones. Table 4.2-2 of the Draft PEIR presents the total acreage of each of the Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program categories located within the three proposed overlay zones. Figure 4.2-1 also presents the proposed overlay zones, so the reader can see the type of Important Farmland that underlies the proposed overlay zones. These categories range from what is considered the most productive (Prime Farmland) to the least productive (Farmland of Local Importance). Therefore, potential impacts to all types of farmland, including areas that are considered the least productive, have been analyzed consistent with CEQA. Furthermore, the proposed Project would not result in any permanent impacts to agricultural resources. Agricultural resources converted to renewable energy resource uses would be temporary and would be restored to agricultural production per Mitigation Measure AG-1b: Reclamation/Decommissioning Plan and Security. Therefore, no farmland would be permanently lost due to renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project.

Furthermore, the proposed Project would maintain agricultural production within Imperial County despite temporary conversions by requiring future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project to prepare an Economic Impact Analysis (EIA), Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA), Employment (Jobs) Impact Analysis (JIA) analyzing potential impacts on agricultural resources pursuant to mitigation measure AG-1c. These benefits would also address possible or perceived socioeconomic impacts associated with future renewable energy projects, such as impacts on agriculture-related businesses and/or loss of agricultural jobs. Future Development Agreements may require the County to grant the funds only to applicants with programs that can demonstrate they are likely to generate an equal number of agricultural jobs when combined with job creation from the future renewable energy facility and other recipients of the future renewable energy project's benefit fees.

The County of Imperial has also developed the "Funding Allocation Guidelines and the Proposed General Procedures/Guidelines for Allocation of Ag Benefit Funds" to ensure that these fees are to be used for the stewardship, protection, and enhancement of agricultural lands within the County (Resolution 2012-005). The Agricultural Business Development Category, such as funding for agricultural commodity processing plants and energy plants that use agricultural products, which was identified as the greatest job creator category, would receive 50 percent of the funds; the Research & Development Category, such as funding for development of new high-yield or water-efficient crops, new water conservation techniques, new technology to improve yields in existing crops, and partial funding for an endowment to support an agricultural research specialist, would receive 20 percent of the funds. Improved water conservation and efficient crop production keeps more farmland in production during drought cycles and therefore supports job creation and maintenance. The Agricultural Stewardship Category, such as programs that bring fields back into production, implement soil reclamation, and improve existing fields to improve crop yields, would receive 20 percent. Increased production of crops again leads to more agricultural jobs to prepare and harvest the fields. The Education/Scholarship Category, such as matching funds for scholarships awarded by agricultural organizations for agricultural studies, student loans, Future Farmers of America and 4-H loans, would receive 10 percent. Training the next generation of farmers and farming operations also supports agricultural job creation.

Comment 18-6: Comment noted.

<u>Comment 18-7:</u> Table 4.2-1 outlines the acreage of the Important Farmland and other land categories in the County and Table 4.2-2 presents information on the amount of each Important Farmland category in each of the proposed renewable energy overlay zones. The following text has been added to the legend of Figure 4.2-1: "See Table 4.2-2 For The Acreage of Each Important Farmland Type Within Each Overlay Zone Category."

<u>Comment 18-8:</u> The County notes the commenter's concern with wind facilities. However, this comment does not identify any specific concerns regarding future wind facilities. Implementation of mitigation measures presented in the Final PEIR would reduce all impacts associated with future wind facilities to a level less than significant with the exception of Aesthetics.

<u>Comment 18-9:</u> The Reclamation and Decommissioning Plan is an appropriate mitigation for a temporary non-agricultural use, as it addresses the specific impact to the soil of the area taken out of agricultural use, including heavy salt build up and compacted ground. IID is the agency responsible for distributing water for agricultural production, and has policies in place to ensure continued agricultural production within Imperial County. Restoration of farmland properties after cessation of renewable energy uses would be granted water rights through the same IID mechanisms as any other farmland

property within Imperial County. If a restored farmland property were unable to secure water rights from IID, it would not be because of the temporary renewable energy use, but the Countywide availability of agricultural water resources.

<u>Comment 18-10</u>: Implementation of mitigation measures HAZ-1a and HAZ-1b would mitigate potential impacts associated with solar panels raised in this comment to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-11:</u> The commenter asserts that preparation of a "Reclamation and Restoration" Plan is not a guarantee that the lands will be restored. The bonding amount for a County-approved CUP has been set by the County on a "project-by-project" basis based on a California engineered analysis of the costs that would be needed to restore the site to agricultural production. The County approved restoration plan is an appropriate mitigation for a temporary non-agricultural use, as it addresses the specific impact to the soil of the area taken out of agricultural use. If the applicant did not perform the restoration work, then the County would use the separate security instrument to perform the restoration work. This assures that the lands will actually be restored to the proper level for continued agricultural use and reduce impacts associated with temporary conversion of agricultural resources to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-12</u>: Future security instruments described in response to comment 18-11 above would include measures to adequately address issues related to solar panel operators possibly going out of business. Future renewable energy CUP's should include a mechanism by which the manufacturer is responsible for pick-up and disposal of defective panels, and funding set aside in a separate security account for such activities.

<u>Comment 18-13</u>: Mitigation Measure UTIL-6 is provided to reduce impacts regarding landfills and waste disposal to less than significant. Mitigation Measure UTIL-6 provides the following:

"...Future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would be required to develop a Waste Management Plan that shall identify the projected waste generated by the activity and feasible methods to divert a minimum of 75 percent of waste from landfills, such as sorting and recycling of materials, reuse of materials, and waste reduction measures..."

Therefore, future renewable energy facilities would not be approved by the County until they had developed a sustainable Waste Management Plan.

<u>Comment 18-14:</u> Section 4.9.4 of the Draft PEIR addresses this issue by stating the following:

"...Hazardous materials associated with construction and operation of future renewable energy facilities described in Section 4.8.4 would have the potential to impact water quality. If precautions are not taken to contain contaminants, accidental spills of these substances during construction and operations could produce contaminated stormwater runoff (nonpoint-source pollution), a major contributor to the degradation of water quality in surface waters. Without proper containment and incident response measures in place, the operation of construction equipment could result in significant direct and indirect impacts to water quality...

"...Prior to construction and grading activities, each project applicant is required to file a Notice of Intent (NOI) with the SWRCB to comply with the General NPDES Construction

Permit and prepare a SWPPP, which addresses the measures that would be included during project construction to minimize and control construction and postconstruction runoff to the "maximum extent practicable." In addition, NPDES permits require the implementation of BMPs that achieve a level of pollution control to the maximum extent practical, which may not necessarily be completely protective of aquatic life or address water quality impairments for local waterways. This could represent a significant direct and indirect impact. For these reasons, the implementation of the prescribed mitigation would be required to ensure that each project's SWPPPs and Grading Plan(s) include measures necessary to minimize water quality impacts as a result of project construction and postconstruction runoff. In addition, given that site decommissioning would result in similar activities as identified for construction, these impacts could also occur in the future during site restoration activities..."

As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, specific impacts related to water quality and corresponding mitigation measures cannot be evaluated at this time. However, future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would have to evaluate potential impacts related to water quality during the project's required environmental review phase. Implementation of mitigation measures HYDRO-1a and HYDRO-1b and any additional mitigation measures that may be required based on site-specific characteristics identified during the environmental review phase would reduce impacts related to water quality to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-15:</u> Per correspondence with the State Department of Conservation, agricultural easements are not required to be located within Imperial County.

<u>Comment 18-16:</u> As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, specific impacts to agriculture-serving businesses and corresponding mitigation measures cannot be evaluated at this time. However, Mitigation Measure AG-1c would require project proponents of future renewable energy facilities to prepare an Economic Impact Analysis (EIA), Employment (Jobs) Impact Analysis (JIA), Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) pursuant to County of Imperial requirements. These analyses would document potential socioeconomic impacts associated with future renewable energy facilities, including potential impacts to agriculture-serving businesses, and identify strategies to mitigate any potential impacts to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-17:</u> The County notes that the commenter does not feel that the mitigation measures for agricultural impacts are adequate. However, this comment does not identify any specific inadequacies with the agricultural mitigation measures presented in Section 4.2.4 of the Draft PEIR. As described in Section 4.2.4 of the Draft PEIR, implementation of mitigation measures AG-1a through AG-3 would reduce impacts to a level less than significant. Please see responses to comments above regarding agricultural resources for details on why these mitigation measures would reduce impacts on agricultural resources to a level less than significant.

Comment 18-18: Comment noted.

<u>Comment 18-19</u>: There is no guarantee that a project would result in the number of employees projected at the time of application due to the number of variables that may change prior to project approval (e.g. project may be reduced, may be withdrawn, or may not be approved).

<u>Comment 18-20</u>: As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, specific impacts associated with risks regarding lithium batteries and potential fire hazards cannot be evaluated at this time. However, future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would have to evaluate potential impacts associated with risks regarding lithium batteries and potential fire hazards during the project's required environmental review phase. Future renewable energy facilities would be required to implement project design and mitigation measures that may be required based on site-specific characteristics identified during the environmental review phase to reduce impacts associated with risks regarding lithium batteries and potential fire hazards to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-21</u>: See response to comment 18-20 above. Each CUP would have an emergency response plan for fires at future renewable energy facilities that would be reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis by the Fire/OES Department.

<u>Comment 18-22</u>: Impacts to farmland are discussed in Section 4.2 of the Draft PEIR. The purpose of this section is to evaluate impacts to land designated as farmland and forest land, and is not intended to be used for evaluation of wildlife on agricultural lands. Section 4.4 of the Draft PEIR discusses biological resources including both vegetation communities and wildlife found throughout the County. "Agriculture" is one of the vegetation types discussed under existing conditions. In addition, the Draft PEIR discusses potential impacts to wildlife as a result of the proposed Project at the programmatic level, which could include the use of farmland for renewable energy siting.

As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, specific impacts to sensitive species and corresponding mitigation measures cannot be evaluated at this time. Future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would have to evaluate potential impacts to sensitive species that utilize agriculture as natural habitat, including the Burrowing owl, during the project's required environmental review phase. Furthermore, Mitigation Measure BIO-1b has been revised to document potential sensitive species surveys that may be required as follows:

"BIO-1b: Conduct Surveys for Special Status Animal Species. As a requirement of an application for a future renewable energy facility, surveys for special status animal species shall be conducted by qualified and agency-approved biologists to determine the presence or absence of sensitive animal species within the footprint of a future renewable energy project. Required surveys for special status animal species may include, but are not limited to, American badgers, burrowing owl, flat-tailed horned lizard, golden eagle, mountain plover, prairie falcons, Swainson's hawk, and Yuma Ridgway's rail, among others. Any special status mammal, reptile, and amphibian species detected during surveys shall be passively relocated to areas outside the construction zone and prevented from reentering the future project area with the installation of silt fencing or other exclusion fencing. All fencing shall be periodically monitored and maintained for the duration of construction. Passive relocation shall only be done in the nonbreeding season in accordance with guidelines and consultations with resource agencies. ThisDepending on which special status species are present within the project boundaries, passive relocation measures may includes covering or excavating all burrows or dens and installing one-way doors into occupied burrows. This would allow any animals inside to leave the burrow but would exclude any animals from

reentering the burrow. The burrows shall then be excavated and filled in to prevent their reuse. <u>Other types of relocation measures may be required, depending on which special status species are present within the project boundaries.</u>

"If direct impacts to special status species cannot be avoided, an agency-approved biologist shall prepare a species-specific Mitigation and Monitoring Plan that would detail the approved, site-specific methodology proposed to minimize and mitigate impacts to each species. Passive relocation, destruction of burrows, construction of artificial burrows, etc. shall be completed only upon prior approval by and in cooperation with CDFW and/or USFWS."

Consequently, future renewable energy facilities developed within agricultural areas would be required to conduct sensitive species surveys and develop appropriate mitigation, which may include a species-specific Mitigation and Monitoring Plan if direct impacts to sensitive species cannot be avoided. A species-specific Mitigation and Monitoring Plan would require prior approval by and in cooperation with CDFW and/or USFWS.

<u>Comment 18-23:</u> Impacts to water quality are discussed in Section 4.9 of the Draft PEIR. Implementation of mitigation measures HYDRO-1a and HYDRO 1b would reduce impacts associated with violation of water quality standards or waste discharge requirements to a level less than significant through the inclusion of focused BMPs for the protection of surface water resources.

As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, specific impacts related to how conversion of grassland to renewable energy uses would impact water quality cannot be evaluated at this time. Future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would have to evaluate potential impacts related to water quality during the project's required environmental review phase. Implementation of mitigation measures HYDRO-1a and HYDRO 1b and any additional mitigation measures that may be required based on site-specific characteristics identified during the environmental review phase would reduce impacts related to water quality to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-24</u>: Section 4.9 –Hydro 2, of the Draft PEIR adequately addresses the likely sources of water for future renewable energy facilities that may be developed under the proposed Project by stating the following:

"...Water sources are likely to be local groundwater, surface water bodies, or recycled water, depending upon availability of those resources. Water could be trucked in from off-site sources as well. ...Water rights and permits would need to be obtained from applicable local, State, and/or regional water authorities before water use could occur. In most areas within the County of Imperial, groundwater would likely be withdrawn from local aquifers to meet a specific project's water needs..."

Section 4.9 –Hydro 5 of the Draft PEIR adequately addresses impacts from contamination of groundwater supplies from hazardous fluids used for industrial scale energy projects by stating the following:

"...Improperly constructed/designed groundwater and geothermal wells could create conduits for poor-quality groundwater, as well as cause contaminants to move between aquifers. Drilling can create pathways for these fluids into the groundwater at shallower depths or commingling between aquifers of differing quality. The impacts of these pathways can alter the natural circulation of the geothermal fluids and impact the usefulness of the resource. Subsurface pathways also can allow the natural contaminants in the geothermal fluids to impact the shallow groundwater quality if mixing were to occur. The degree of impact depends on aquifer characteristics and whether special conditions (e.g., sole source aquifers) are present..."

The Draft PEIR presents a programmatic analysis of environmental impacts that provides a framework for future analysis to be conducted for future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project. As a programmatic evaluation, the Draft PEIR does not evaluate site-specific issues associated with individual renewable energy projects. A variety of location-specific factors (e.g., aquifer characteristics such as whether it is confined or unconfined, storage capacity, groundwater movement, specific yield) would vary considerably from site to site, especially over the Countywide area. In addition, the variations in project size and design would greatly determine the magnitude of the impacts from a given project. The combined effects of these location-specific and project-specific factors cannot be fully anticipated or addressed in a programmatic analysis; such effects must be evaluated at the individual project level. Implementation of mitigation measures HYDRO-1a and HYDRO-3 would reduce impacts associated with future renewable energy facilities to a level less than significant. Furthermore, additional mitigation beyond what is presented in the Final PEIR may be required based on project specific characteristics.

<u>Comment 18-25</u>: There is no substantial evidence in the scientific literature or from monitoring of existing renewable energy facilities in Imperial County to suggest that nighttime light sources or glare attract a disproportionately high number of insect crop pests, let alone increased crop damage from insect pests in the immediate area of nighttime lighting. Many insects such as moths, mayflies, mosquitoes, and a variety of beetle species are phototactic (attracted by light) and these species are not considered as crop pests. In contrast, some of the more severe crop pests such as aphids, armyworms, wireworms, cutworms, and various species of beetles and grubs show no affinitive attraction to nighttime light sources or glare.

<u>Comment 18-26</u>: See response to comment 18-25 above. As noted in the Draft PEIR, "...[a]Ithough implementation of mitigation measure AESTH-3 would minimize affects of glint and glare, some impacts could remain. Additional mitigation may be developed for specific projects, but it is anticipated that impacts would remain significant and unavoidable..."

<u>Comment 18-27</u>: An empirical study entitled "Analysis of the Potential for Heat Island Effect in Large Solar Farms" (Fthenakis and Yu, n.d.) conducted by Columbia University concluded that there is no significant increase in ambient air temperature around solar farms. The Columbia University Study also indicated that solar panels store less heat than the natural earth surface and serve to cool temperatures below ambient levels based on their construction of lightweight glass surrounded by airflow. Accordingly, the study concluded that a PV solar farm does not induce an ongoing increase in ambient air temperature. Therefore, future solar facilities developed under the proposed Project would not result in "heat island" effects that would necessitate additional irrigation on adjacent farmland while likely reducing efficiency and crop productivity.

<u>Comment 18-28</u>: This comment makes a general claim that infrastructure associated with renewable energy facilities will have a negative effect on farms. However, no specific impacts associated with this type of infrastructure are identified. Section 4.2.4 of the Draft PEIR analyzed potential impacts to adjacent farmlands and determined that implementation of mitigation measures AG-1a through AG-3, AQ-1a, HYDRO-1a, and HYDRO-1b would reduce impacts to a level less than significant. The comment does not inquire about any specific impacts on adjacent residents.

<u>Comment 18-29</u>: The locations of existing and proposed renewable energy facilities are presented on Figure 3.2-1 – Cumulative Projects of the Draft of PEIR. Table 3.2-1 has been updated to reflect the most recent data on past, present, and reasonable foreseeable projects within Imperial County.

<u>Comment 18-30</u>: As described in the Draft PEIR, the proposed Project would be implemented on a "project-by-project" basis based on County approval of individual renewable energy projects. Consequently, it is unclear if any additional agricultural land will be taken out of production at this time.

<u>Comment 18-31</u>: Vegetation displaced by future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would not result in a substantial increase in atmospheric greenhouse gas. Furthermore, Section 4.7.4 of the Draft PEIR describes how the proposed Project would reduce greenhouse gas emissions by stating the following:

"...Electricity generated by future renewable energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would displace GHG emissions currently produced by carbon-based fuels. Using the conservative estimate of GHG emissions for marginal power plants developed by the CPUC, future solar and wind facilities would eliminate a minimum of 830 pounds CO₂e per MWh. Similarly, future geothermal energy facilities developed under the proposed Project would displace approximately 520 pounds CO₂e per MWh. The displacement of CO₂e for geothermal production would be reduced by 310 pounds CO₂e per MWh due to the CO₂ that occurs naturally in geothermal steam released by operations at a geothermal plant (DRECP<u>EIR/EIS</u> 2014, <u>IV.3-9</u>). Consequently, displacement of power currently produced by carbon-based fuels by development of future renewable energy facilities would offset GHG emissions generated during construction, operation, and decommissioning of future renewable energy facilities and reduce impacts to a level less than significant. No mitigation measures would be required..."

<u>Comment 18-32:</u> This comment addresses concerns that the "imperiled Salton Sea" could lead to an "environmental disaster." However, the comment does not address how the proposed Project could lead to additional impacts to the Salton Sea. The Draft PEIR addresses impacts to the Salton Sea throughout the document including the cumulative impacts, aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, hydrology, land use, and recreation sections. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the County of Imperial has worked in partnership with the Imperial Irrigation District to develop the Salton Sea Restoration & Renewable Energy Initiative. This initiative will utilize funds generated by development of future renewable energy facilities at the Salton Sea to help finance activities for habitat restoration and air quality management. Future renewable energy facilities sited on exposed lakebeds of the Salton Sea would serve a dual purpose of producing renewable energy while doubling as groundcover to mitigate air emissions. The Salton Sea Authority is responsible for leading the planning and implementation of future renewable energy facilities at the Salton Sea with support from the State of California and other agencies.

<u>Comment 18-33:</u> Objective 1.1 has been revised to state the following:

"Objective 1.1: The County of Imperial supports the <u>overall</u> goals and objectives of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan to plan for, encourage, and facilitate<u>provide a balance between</u> the full_development of all_renewable energy resources <u>while preserving sensitive environmental resources</u> within its jurisdiction."

<u>Comment 18-34</u>: Comment noted. Each County approved CUP typically has mitigation measures that are monitored and have been deemed effective with applicable regulatory requirements.

<u>Comment 18-35</u>: County approved CUPs for future renewable energy facilities that may be developed would include conditions that the sales tax revenues for the solar equipment shall be paid for in Imperial County rather than in the place of "origin." This condition shall be imposed to increase County revenue on these types of projects to cover the costs from construction through decommissioning and restoration.

<u>Comment 18-36</u>: Imperial County is not too hot for the efficient operation of solar energy facilities. Existing solar energy facilities have operated efficiently in Imperial County without any problems related to heat.

<u>Comment 18-37:</u> Section 4.11.4 of the Draft PEIR evaluated whether the proposed Project would result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource or locally important mineral resource recovery site that would be of value to the region and the residents of the State. The Draft PEIR determined that implementation of mitigation measure MR-1a and MR-1b would reduce impacts related to the loss of availability of a known mineral resource or locally important mineral resource recovery site to a level less than significant.

<u>Comment 18-38:</u> Future renewable energy facilities to be developed under the proposed Project would be able to displace fossil fuel based systems and meet future energy demand that would otherwise be met with fossil fuel based generation because they would include an additional technology in the form of on-site energy electric energy storage systems. For example, the energy storage systems of future solar facilities would provide energy to meet consumer demands for electrical power during the evening when the solar panels cannot generate power. Accordingly, the combined solar energy and energy storage features of the future solar facilities would meet the consumer demand that would otherwise be met with a baseload or peaker power plant operating on fossil fuel.

This response and rationale is also supported by energy experts at the California Public Utility Commission in a 2010 white paper entitled "Electric Energy Storage: An Assessment of Potential Barriers and Opportunities" (CPUC 2010). The paper explains:

"...In the past, planners relied chiefly upon large dispatchable fossil fuel generators to provide electric energy. The energy from these facilities was transmitted over the bulk transmission system and ultimately consumed by end-use customers. However, this model is changing. California's current energy policies mandate the development of new types of renewable and distributed generation resources, such as wind and solar. These resources by their nature are intermittent and cannot be directly dispatched by system operators to meet customer load. Thus, if the state wants to properly plan for these new types of resources, the historic model of electric system planning must be re-thought. Since operators of the electricity grid must constantly match electricity supply and demand, intermittent renewable resources are more challenging to incorporate into the electricity grid than traditional generation technologies. Intermittent renewable technologies cannot be scheduled to produce power in specific amounts at specific times, creating additional challenges and costs to resource procurement. Moreover, as more intermittent resources are deployed to meet increasing Renewable Portfolio Standards ('RPS') requirements, the operational challenges will become greater. Specifically, since planners cannot control when renewable generation will occur, the generation can often occur at times when there is little need for that power. However, a promising new set of Electric Energy Storage ('EES') technologies appear to provide an effective means for addressing the growing problem of reliance on an increasing percentage of intermittent renewable generation resources.

"In the past, it was difficult, if not impossible, to store large amounts of electricity. There were two main barriers: economic (too expensive) and technological (inefficient, impractical). Recent advancements have been achieved and certain storage technologies have progressed through successful pilot and demonstration phases. As such, these technologies are poised to become commercially viable. EES offers California multiple economic and environmental benefits. By utilizing EES technologies to store intermittent renewable power, the state may reduce greenhouse gas emissions from carbon-based electricity production, avoid the need to build expensive new transmission lines and power plants to meet peak energy demand, increase system reliability and generate economic activity through the manufacturing and operation of these EES technologies (CEC White Paper at pp. 1-2)..."

Comment 18-39: Comment noted.

<u>Comment 18-40</u>: The commenter's opinion regarding the visual character of the County is noted; however, in terms of adequately describing the existing visual resources within the County, areas of solar development are a part of the existing visual landscape of the region.

<u>Comment 18-41</u>: The commenter's opinion has been noted. Prohibiting solar on farmland is not an objective of the proposed Project. Projects often times often implicate a variety of goals, policies, and objectives within the County's General Plan that must, in some instances, be balanced against each other. Consequently, the General Plan cautions against its Goals and Policies being interpreted as doctrine:

"...Imperial County's Goals and Objectives are intended to serve as long-term principles and policy statements representing ideals which have been determined by the citizens as being desirable and deserving of community time and resources to achieve. The Goals and Objectives, therefore, are important guidelines for agricultural land use decision making. It is recognized, however, that other social, economic, environmental, and legal considerations are involved in land use decisions and that these Goals and Objectives, and those of other General Plan Elements, should be used as guidelines but not doctrines (General Plan Agricultural Element, page 29 [Section III.A Preface])..."

Comment 18-42: Comment noted.

<u>Comment 18-43</u>: Thank you for expressing your support of Objective 3.1 to preserve IID's role as a balancing authority and rate making authority.

Comment 18-44: Comment noted.

<u>Comment 18-45:</u> It should also be noted that the County of Imperial has worked in partnership with the Imperial Irrigation District to develop the Salton Sea Restoration & Renewable Energy Initiative. This initiative will utilize funds generated by development of future renewable energy facilities at the Salton Sea to help finance activities for habitat restoration and air quality management. Future renewable energy facilities sited on exposed lakebeds of the Salton Sea would serve a dual purpose of producing renewable energy while doubling as groundcover to mitigate air emissions. The Salton Sea Authority is responsible for leading the planning and implementation of future renewable energy facilities at the Salton Sea with support from the State of California and other agencies.

<u>Comment 18-46:</u> Comment noted. Any pilot project would be subject to the normal permitting, regulatory, and environmental process.

<u>Comment 18-47:</u> Please see response to comment 18-24 above for a discussion of water supply.

<u> 19 – Nicholas Guillaume, Pristine Sun</u>

Nick Larkin		
To: Cc: Subject:	Patricia Valenzuela; Oliver Alvarado; Brian Mooney; Russ Hunt; Richard Cabanilla Michael Abraham RE: Comments to the Draft EIR "RENEWABLE ENERGY & TRANSMISSION ELEMENT UPDATE" Commercial solar project in Ocotillo, CA	
From: Nicolas Gui Sent: Thursday, Ja To: Jim Minnick Cc: Patricia Valena Subject: Commen project in Ocotillo Importance: High	llaume [mailto:nicolas.guillaume@pristinesun.com] muary 22, 2015 2:28 PM zuela its to the Draft EIR "RENEWABLE ENERGY & TRANSMISSION ELEMENT UPDATE" Commercial solar o, CA	
Hi Jim,		
l spoke to Patricia ENERGY & TRANS Please find below	last week and Patricia mentioned that it is possible to submit comments to the Draft EIR "RENEWAB MISSION ELEMENT UPDATE - JANUARY 2015" (<u>http://www.icpds.com/?pid=4284</u>) till January 26th. our comments.	LE Comment 19-1
Pristine Sun has a development, con Ocotillo, CA (Impe overlay in the pro (<u>ftp://ftp.co.impe</u> note that the size aforementioned. Besides, Pristine S are best suited for considerations of	fully executed site lease with the landowner of APN 033-240-005 and 033-240-006, for the istruction and operation of an approximately 50-acre grid-connected solar facility in the vicinity of arial county). We request our project parcels to be added to the "renewable energy/geothermal" posed land use map, depicted in page 5 of the draft EIR <u>rial.ca.us/icpds/eir/cec/04project-description.pdf</u>). Our proposition is attached to this email. Please and location of the added area might be approximate, however it intends to include the two parcels Gun is a new kind of solar company, reaching out to selective communities like the one in Ocotillo, where smaller scale solar projects. Pristine Sun would make every effort to be sensitive to the the surrounding parcel owners and their community as a whole.	Comment 19-2
Please confirm yo	u received our comments by replying to this email.	
Best regards,		T 19-3
Nicolas Guillaum	e Project Manager	
Pristine Sun, LLC and. W (415) 848-8162 N HQ: 101 Mission Street	subsidiaries A (415) 298-5825 <u>www.pristinesun.com</u> et. Suite 1050, San Francisco, CA 94105-1733	



Response to Comment Letter #19: Nicholas Guillaume, Pristine Sun

<u>Comment 19-1</u>: Thank you for your comment on the Imperial County General Plan *Renewable Energy and Transmission Element* Update Draft PEIR. We have provided a response to your specific comment below.

<u>Comment 19-2:</u> The location of your property does not coincide with the areas identified for the overlay zone in the constraints analysis and has not been included in the revised Figure 2.4-1 presented in the Final PEIR. The revised ordinance currently proposes the following criteria in addition to what is currently required under existing law for a overlay zone change:

"...<u>An amendment to the overlay zone would only be approved by the County Board of</u> <u>Supervisors if a future renewable energy project met one of the following two</u> <u>conditions:</u>

- Adjacent to the Existing RE Overlay Zone: An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future renewable energy project located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
 - Is not located in a sensitive area
 - o Does not have any significant biological or agricultural resources on-site
- "Island" Overlay: An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future renewable energy project that is not located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
 - o Is located adjacent (sharing a common boundary) to an existing transmission source
 - o Consists of the expansion of an existing renewable energy operation
 - o Would not result in any significant environmental impacts..."

Please contact the County of Imperial Planning and Development Services Department if you would like to apply for an overlay zone amendment.

<u>Comment 19-3:</u> Thank you for your comment on the Imperial County General Plan *Renewable Energy and Transmission Element* Update Draft PEIR. We have received your comment letter and provided a response to your specific comment above.