4.0 INTRODUCTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

This section provides an overview of the environmental analysis and presents the format for the environmental analysis in each topical section.

4.0.1 ORGANIZATION OF ISSUE AREAS

This chapter provides an analysis of impacts for those environmental topics that the County determined could result in "significant impacts." Sections 4.1 through 4.14 discuss the environmental impacts that may result with approval and implementation of the projects. Each environmental issue area in Chapter 4 contains a description of the following:

- The environmental setting as it relates to the specific issue;
- The regulatory framework governing that issue;
- The threshold of significance (from Appendix G of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines);
- The methodology used in identifying and considering the issues;
- An evaluation of the project-specific impacts and identification of mitigation measures;
- A determination of the level of significance after mitigation measures are implemented; and
- The identification of any residual significant impacts following mitigation.

4.0.2 FORMAT OF THE IMPACT ANALYSIS

This analysis presents the potential impacts that could occur under the projects along with any supporting mitigation requirements. For further differentiation of project-related impacts, this analysis presents additional discussion specific to each of the individual components that comprise the projects, including the Conditional Use Permit Applications (CUPs) and Variance Applications on file with the County. For each impact statement, the impact discussion is sub-divided, as appropriate, to differentiate between the environmental effects for each of the following project components described in Chapter 3, Project Description:

- Ferrell Solar Farm (FSF)
- Rockwood Solar Farm (RSF)
- Iris Solar Farm (ISF); and
- Lyons Solar Farm (LSF)

Where similar environmental impacts would occur for multiple projects and/or components, the impact discussion is consolidated. Likewise, in instances where impacts would be different for one or more projects or components, the discussion is separated accordingly to distinguish between key differences in the level of impact. Subheadings and sub-numbering is used, where appropriate, for transitions between major topics and particular distinctions in impact determinations for sub-issues covered by the impact statement. Terminology used in describing the range of impact mechanisms follows that described below. Where mitigation is prescribed, the analysis clearly indicates to which project component(s) it would apply.

Each section identifies the resulting level of significance of the impact using the terminology described below following the application of the proposed mitigation. The section includes an explanation of how the mitigation measure(s) reduces the impact in relation to the applied threshold of significance. If the impact remains significant (i.e., at or above the threshold of significance) additional discussion is provided to disclose the implications of the residual impact and indicate why no mitigation is available or why the applied mitigation does not reduce the impact to a less than significant level.

4.0.3 DETERMINATION OF IMPACT SIGNIFICANCE

Changes that would result from the projects were evaluated relative to existing environmental conditions within the project study areas as defined in Chapter 3 and illustrated in Figure 3.0-2. Existing environmental conditions are based on the time at which the Notice of Preparation was published on April 23, 2014. In evaluating the significance of these changes, this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) applies thresholds of significance that have been developed using (1) criteria discussed in the CEQA Guidelines; (2) criteria based on factual or scientific information; and (3) criteria based on regulatory standards of local, state, and/or federal agencies. Mechanisms that could cause impacts are discussed for each issue area.

This EIR uses the following terminology to denote the significance of environmental impacts of the projects:

- *No impact* indicates that the construction, operation, and maintenance of the project would not have any direct or indirect effects on the environment. It means no change from existing conditions. This impact level does not need mitigation.
- A *less than significant impact* is one that would not result in a substantial or potentially substantial adverse change in the physical environment. This impact level does not require mitigation, even if feasible, under CEQA.
- A *significant impact* is defined by CEQA Section 21068 as one that would cause "a substantial, or potentially substantial, adverse change in any of the physical conditions within the area affected by the project." Levels of significance can vary by project, based on the change in the existing physical condition. Under CEQA, mitigation measures or alternatives to the projects must be provided, where feasible, to reduce the magnitude of significant impacts.
- An *unmitigable significant impact* is one that would result in a substantial or potentially substantial adverse effect on the environment, and that could not be reduced to a less than significant level even with any feasible mitigation. Under CEQA, a project with significant and unmitigable impacts could proceed, but the lead agency would be required to prepare a "statement of overriding considerations" in accordance with State CEQA Guidelines CCR Section 15093, explaining why the lead agency would proceed with the project in spite of the potential for significant impacts.