



**NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT
EIR AND SCOPING MEETING**

DATE: March 29, 2022
TO: Responsible Agencies and Interested Parties
SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact Report and Scoping Meeting

Pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the County of San Bernardino (County) must conduct a review of the environmental impacts of the Vidal Energy Project (Project). Implementation of the Project will require discretionary approvals from State and local agencies, and therefore, the Project is subject to the environmental review requirements of CEQA. As the lead agency under CEQA, and due to the involvement of potentially significant impacts to the environment, the County is therefore issuing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Project.

PROJECT TITLE: Vidal Energy Project - PROJ-2021-00012

PROJECT APPLICANT: CDH Vidal, LLC

ASSESSOR'S PARCEL NUMBERS: 0647-051-08 and 11; 0647-061-01 to 05, 08, 09, 13, 15, 16, 20, 22, 29, and 30; 0647-081-37; 0647-091-03 to 06; and 0490-223-33

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

CDH Vidal LLC (CORE) plans to construct and operate the Vidal Energy Project (Project), a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation and energy storage facility that would produce up to 160 megawatts (MW) of solar power and include up to 640 megawatt hours (MWh) of energy storage capacity rate in a battery energy storage system (BESS) on up to approximately 1,220 acres of land. The Project would be supported by the existing, adjacent Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) 161-kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission corridor. The Project would include the construction of one on-site substation facility, which would collect and convert the power generated on-site for transmission in an overhead or underground line to the WAPA transmission system and interconnection location. The Project's permanent facilities would include PV panels, BESS, fencing, service roads, a power collection system, communication cables, overhead and underground transmission lines, electrical switchyards, a Project substation, and operations and maintenance (O&M) facilities.

Project Objectives

The following are the Project objectives:

- Utilize property within the County to site photovoltaic (PV) solar power-generating facilities and energy storage near existing utility infrastructure
- Support California's efforts to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions consistent with the timeline established by the California Global Warming Solutions Act under Assembly Bill 32, as amended by Senate Bill 32, which requires that Statewide GHG emissions be reduced to at least 40 percent below the Statewide GHG emissions limit by 2030
- Support California's Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS) Program consistent with the timeline established by Senate Bill 100, which requires that by December 31, 2030, 60 percent of all electricity sold in the State shall be generated from renewable energy sources
- Develop an economically feasible and commercially financeable power-generating facility and energy storage system
- Provide solar-generated electricity to the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) grid and WAPA
- Promote the County's role as the State's leading producer of renewable energy
- Provide green jobs to the County and the State of California
- Site and design the Project in an environmentally responsible manner consistent with current County guidelines.

Project Site

The Project Site is located approximately 2.5 miles southeast of unincorporated Vidal, just east of U.S. Route 95, north of the Riverside County boundary, and west of the Colorado River (see **Figure 1**). The Project Site encompasses 1,220 acres within 21 privately owned parcels (in their entirety and portions of) that are in the process of lease acquisition by CORE. The County's Zoning Map identifies the zoning of the Project Site as Resource Conservation (RC), which provides sites for open space and recreational activities, single-family homes on very large parcels, and similar and compatible uses. Commercial renewable energy facilities are an allowable use within the RC land use zoning district. Existing development and disturbed areas within the Project Site include rural access roads that include access to the transmission line, scattered abandoned rural residences, garage (storage) areas, and several WAPA towers. The wash areas are currently being used by off-highway vehicles. Primary access to the Project would be provided via U.S. Route 95 onto a Project-controlled, dirt access road on the west side of the Project Site.

Project Overview and Design

The Project includes the development of solar PV facilities, BESS, and associated infrastructure with the capacity to generate up to 160 MW of solar energy and up to 640

MWh of energy storage capacity rate. The Project would be fenced to prevent access by the public. Gates would be installed at the roads entering the Project site. Limiting access to the Project site would be necessary both to ensure the safety of the public and to protect the equipment from potential theft and vandalism. The Project consists of the following components:

Solar Generator and Power Conversion Stations (Inverters). The Project would develop PV modules utilizing either fixed tilt or tracker technology. Within the proposed solar arrays would be power conversion stations (PCS), also known as inverters, that would contain at a minimum one inverter and one transformer. Inverters would be housed within an enclosed structure. A PCS would also be anticipated to include an exhaust fan and a heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) system, which would be mounted to the exterior of the enclosure.

Battery Storage. The Project's BESS would have a capacity of 640 MWh. The BESS would likely consist of containers housing batteries connected in strings and mounted on racks. The container would likely include a transformer, monitoring equipment, and lighting and cooling equipment. The Project would utilize up to 47 containers (depending on container dimensions), with each container being up to 80 feet long by 8 feet wide and 8 feet tall. Two different locations and methods of storage are proposed for the BESS, including: (1) all BESS containers would be consolidated within the Project substation area; or (2) BESS equipment would be distributed throughout the Project's solar arrays by collocating a single BESS container with each of the Project's block inverters with the BESS and inverter housed in a new or the same container. Method 1, if fully employed, would require approximately 7.1 acres within the Project substation area to house the BESS containers. Under Method 2, the BESS containers would contain batteries only, and the inverters would remain central to the solar array blocks. Project design would include shielded and motion-activated lighting and safety features within each container. The containers are equipped with a door on each end and include fire detection and fire suppression systems. Cables and cooling pipes would pass through the container floor.

Project Substations. The Project would include construction of one substation facility located in the southeastern corner of the Project Site boundary. The substation that would collect the power generated by the PV solar system blocks, transport the power via the underground/overhead power collection system, and then convert the power for transmission in WAPA's overhead 161-kV line. Equipment at the Project substation would include transformers, bus work, switches, breakers, and all associated equipment required to be compliant with utility-grade interconnection services. The substation facilities would house the power generation control and relaying equipment, station batteries, and Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition System (SCADA) and communication systems. The Project substation would be remotely operated and periodically maintained but would not be permanently staffed. The substation site would be cleared, graded, and graveled. A security fence would be installed around the perimeter for safety and security purposes. The fence would consist of an up to 6-foot

chain-link fence with up to three strands of barbed wire for a total maximum height of 8 feet. For safety purposes this fence would not be adapted for wildlife movement. Construction and operations of the Project substation would affect approximately 6 acres. The BESS may also be co-located within or adjacent to the substation yard.

Construction

Project construction is anticipated to be completed over a period of up to approximately 14 months. The on-site construction workforce is expected to peak at approximately 495 individuals; however, the average daily workforce on-site is expected to be approximately 220 workers per day. Construction would occur Monday through Friday, between 7:00 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Any construction work performed outside of the normal work schedule would be coordinated with the appropriate agencies and would conform to the County Noise Ordinance.

Operations

Upon completion of construction and testing, the Project would be operated during daylight hours. Up to 12 full-time and/or part-time staff would be required for operation, inspection, security, maintenance, and system monitoring purposes. Typical O&M activities during Project operations include, but are not limited to, facility monitoring; administration and reporting; remote operations of inverters, BESS system and other equipment; site security and management; communication protocol; repair and maintenance of solar facilities, substation, electrical transmission lines, and other Project facilities; and periodic panel washing. Panel washing would utilize water that would be purchased from a local supplier using groundwater wells.

Decommissioning

At the end of the Project's operational term (anticipated to be approximately 35 years), CORE may choose to update site technology and recommission, or CORE will decommission the site and remove the systems and components. All decommissioning and restoration activities would adhere to the requirements of the appropriate governing authorities and be in accordance with all applicable federal, State, and County regulations. The Applicant will work with the County to ensure decommissioning of the Project after its productive lifetime complies with all applicable local, state, and federal requirements best management practices (BMPs).

EIR SCOPE

As set forth in the California Public Resources Code (PRC) Section et seq., and the CEQA Guidelines, codified in the California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq, the County has determined, based on substantial evidence and in light of the whole record before the lead agency, that the Project may have a significant effect on the environment and that an Environmental Impact Report shall be prepared for the Project. (PRC Sections 21080(d) and (e); 21802.2(d); 21083(b); and CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(d) and 15081).

The Lead Agency has initially identified the following environmental considerations as potentially significant effects of the Project:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology and Soils
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Noise
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources

The EIR will assess the effects of the Project on the environment, identify potentially significant impacts, identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potentially significant environmental impacts, and discuss potentially feasible alternatives to the Project that may accomplish basic project objectives while lessening or eliminating any potentially significant project impacts.

RESPONSIBLE AGENCIES

A responsible agency means a public agency other than the lead agency, which has permitting authority or approval power over some aspect of the overall project. This Notice provides a description of the Project and solicits comments from responsible agencies, trustee agencies, federal, State and local agencies, and other interested parties on the scope and content of the environmental document to be prepared to analyze the environmental impacts of the project.

Comments received in response to this Notice will be reviewed and considered by the lead agency in determining the scope of the EIR. Due to time limits, as defined by CEQA, your response should be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than thirty (30) days after publication of this Notice. We need to know the views of your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to you or to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Project. Your agency may need to use the EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the Project.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

The NOP is available for public review on the County's website at:

<http://cms.sbcounty.gov/lus/Planning/Environmental/Desert.aspx>

Additionally, a copy of the NOP is available for public review at the following locations:

Notice of Preparation of a Draft EIR and Scoping Meeting

San Bernardino County High Desert
Government Center
15900 Smoke Tree Street, Suite 1331
Hesperia, CA 92345

San Bernardino County Library
Barstow Branch
304 E. Buena Vista Street
Barstow, CA 92311

San Bernardino County
Government Center
385 North Arrowhead Avenue, Second Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415

We would like to hear what you think. Comments and/or questions should be directed to Jim Morrissey, Planner, via U.S. mail or email **by no later than 5:00 p.m. on April 27, 2022.**

County of San Bernardino, Land Use Services Department
Attn.: Jim Morrissey, Planner
385 North Arrowhead Avenue, First Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415
Email: Jim.Morrissey@lus.sbcounty.gov

Please include the name, phone number, and address of your agency's contact person in your response.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

The CEQA process encourages comments and questions from the public throughout the planning process. Consistent with Section 21083.9 of the CEQA Statute, a Public Scoping Meeting will be held to solicit public comments on the scope and content of the EIR. A virtual scoping meeting will be held for this Project. The date and meeting details are as follows:

Date and Time: April 12, 2022 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 pm (Pacific Time)

Place: Via Zoom: <https://tinyurl.com/VidalEnergyPublicScoping>

The zoom meeting may also be accessed through the zoom website by using the following:

Webinar ID: 926 8704 1371

Join by Telephone: 888 475 4499 (Toll Free)

If you require additional information please contact Jim Morrissey, Planner, at (909) 387-4234.

