

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) assesses the environmental impacts associated with the Lompoc Wind Energy Project (Project). Pacific Renewable Energy Generation LLC (Pacific Renewable Energy Generation) is the Applicant and proposes to develop, construct, and operate the Project. Pacific Renewable Energy Generation is the Project Company of Acciona Wind Energy USA LLC (Acciona Wind Energy USA), hereby referred to as the Applicant. Acciona Wind Energy USA is a wholly owned, indirect subsidiary of Acciona, S.A. (Acciona), a large Spanish conglomerate involved in the development and operation of renewable energy projects.

As the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), Santa Barbara County (County), prepared a Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the Project on June 30, 2006, and determined that an EIR would be required as part of the permitting process. In compliance with CEQA guidelines, the County solicited public and agency comments through the distribution of the NOP. An EIR scoping meeting was held on July 17, 2006, at Lompoc City Council Chambers. Following a presentation by County staff, members of the public spoke about a number of potentially adverse impacts of the Project, including bird mortality from turbine operation and visual impacts from turbines and power lines. Several speakers described beneficial impacts. These comments were used to help direct the scope of the analysis in this EIR.

1.2 Project Overview

The Lompoc Wind Energy Facility (LWEF), the wind turbine generator (WTG) component of the Project, would be located on approximately 2,950 acres of rural, agriculturally zoned land on coastal ridges southwest of Lompoc. The LWEF would have a maximum electrical generating capacity of 120 megawatts (MW), which could potentially supply up to 60,000 homes with electricity. The Applicant has contracted with Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) to deliver 82.5 MW of renewable energy and capacity under a long-term power purchase agreement via a direct interconnection with the PG&E transmission grid. The remainder of the planned capacity would be developed in up to two subsequent phases and installed upon securing additional long-term power purchase agreements with PG&E or others. According to the Project application, the proposed wind farm could generate up to 350 million kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity annually. The target date for commercial operations is October 1, 2008. The anticipated operational life of the Project is approximately 30 years.

Following are the major Project components:

- 60 to 80 WTGs
- New access roads and road improvements

- A communication system
- Meteorological towers
- An operations and maintenance (O&M) facility
- Onsite electrical collection and distribution lines
- An onsite Project Substation
- A new 7.85-mile, 115-kilovolt (kV) PG&E power line to the Lompoc area to interconnect with the PG&E electric grid
- Upgrades to existing PG&E facilities

1.3 Project Objectives

The Applicant has proposed to develop an economically viable wind energy project in Santa Barbara County to generate and deliver renewable energy to the power grid. As a private project, the most basic objectives are as follows:

1. To develop a wind energy project that will produce from 80 up to 120 MW in an area where the wind resources are known to be sufficient to do so
2. To develop an economically viable wind energy project that will support commercially available financing
3. To provide Project property owners with a stable, secondary source of income to supplement income from ranching and farming operations to support ranch maintenance and improvements
4. To help PG&E meet its Renewable Energy Portfolio requirements by adding significantly to its portfolio of wind-generated power
5. To begin operating the wind project in time to meet milestones of an existing power purchase agreement and to qualify for certain tax credits

In addition, the Project meets the following public objectives:

1. To meet regional energy needs in an efficient, sustainable, and environmentally sound manner, as provided in the Energy Element of the Santa Barbara County Comprehensive Plan, which encourages use of alternative energy for environmental and economic benefits, and encourages opportunities for businesses that develop or market alternative energy technologies
2. To assist California in meeting its legislated Renewable Energy Portfolio standards for the generation of renewable energy in the state, which require investor-owned utilities to purchase 20 percent of their power from renewable sources by the year 2010
3. To offset the need for additional electricity generated from fossil fuels and thereby assist the state in meeting its air quality goals and reducing greenhouse gas emissions

4. To promote the long-term economic viability of agricultural uses in the Santa Barbara County, including grazing and dry land farming, by developing an agriculturally compatible land use to supplement income from traditional agricultural activities
5. To provide Santa Barbara County with additional tax revenues

1.4 Project Approvals

The Project would require various approvals prior to implementation. Several local, state, and federal authorizations/approvals would be required, as follows:

1.4.1 County of Santa Barbara

The County of Santa Barbara would need to authorize or approve the following quasi-adjudicative items:

- Conditional Use Permit (CUP), pursuant to Land Use & Development Code (LUDC) Section 35.82.060. It is anticipated that the County would issue separate zoning clearances for each phase of the Project.
- Approve the variance from the setback requirement, as specified in LUDC Section 35.57.050, to allow the WTGs to be located as close as 150 feet from the Vandenberg Air Force Base property lines along the south and west LWEF boundaries and from internal property lines within the LWEF site.

The County Planning Commission would consider each of these actions. Approval would not be required by the Board of Supervisors unless the CUP were appealed. After approval of the CUP, the County would issue a zoning clearance for each development phase after the necessary permit conditions were satisfied.

Other County agencies requiring permits or approvals include the following. (For an itemized list of required permits or approvals, refer to Section 2.9.)

- Planning and Development Department
- Public Works Department
- Flood Control District
- Environmental Health Services
- Air Pollution Control District
- Public Works Department, Roads Division
- Santa Barbara County Fire Department
- Building and Safety Division

Additional permits and approvals may be needed from the following agencies. (For an itemized list of required permits or approvals, refer to Section 2.9.)

- City of Lompoc
- Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
- California Public Utilities Commission
- California Department of Fish and Game
- California Department of Transportation

- United States Army Corps of Engineers
- United States Fish and Wildlife Service
- Federal Aviation Administration

1.5 Environmental Impact Report Scope

This EIR examines potential short-term and long-term impacts of the Project. These impacts were determined through a rigorous process mandated by CEQA in which existing conditions are compared and contrasted with conditions that would exist once the Project was implemented. The significance of each identified impact was determined using County Thresholds of Significance (County, 2006). The following categories are used for classifying Project related impacts:

- *Class I* – Significant adverse impacts that cannot be feasibly mitigated or avoided. If the Project is approved, decision-makers are required to adopt a statement of overriding consideration, pursuant to CEQA Section 15093, explaining why Project benefits outweigh the unavoidable, adverse environmental effects.
- *Class II* – Significant adverse Impacts that can be feasibly mitigated or avoided. If the Project is approved, decision-makers are required to make findings pursuant to CEQA Section 15091, that impacts have been mitigated to the maximum extent feasible by implementing the recommended mitigations.
- *Class III* – Adverse impacts that are less than significant. These impacts do not require that CEQA findings be made.
- *Class IV* – Beneficial impacts.

For each significant impact identified, mitigation measures that are designed to reduce impacts to less than significant levels are presented. The Applicant has proposed many mitigation measures as part of the Project application, and the County has supplemented them by refining the Applicant's measures and adding new measures as needed. In those instances where mitigation measures cannot reduce such impacts to less than significant levels, the impacts are identified as Class I. Where appropriate, mitigation measures also have been developed that reduce adverse, but less than significant (*Class III*) impacts to the maximum extent feasible.

The EIR also presents alternatives to the Project, including the "No Project" alternative, and a qualitative assessment of the impacts that would be associated with the implementation of each. Finally, the cumulative impacts of the Project when added to other local proposed or approved projects are evaluated.

1.5.1 Mitigation Monitoring

CEQA requires that a public agency adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Report Plan (MMRP) for mitigation measures that have been incorporated into the project to reduce or avoid significant impacts on the environment. The MMRP is designed to ensure compliance during project implementation, as required by Public Resources code Section 21081.6.

As written, the mitigation measures contained in this EIR comprise the MMRP for the Project and will obligate the County to continue to implement them as conditions of approval. The County will review the MMRP in conjunction with certification of the Final EIR.

1.6 Environmental Impact Report Organization

This EIR contains an Executive Summary, which presents an overview of the Project and its impacts. This is followed by:

- Section 1.0: Introduction contains a summary of the purpose and scope of the EIR.
- Section 2.0: Project Description provides details on the Project components.
- Section 3.0: Environmental Setting, Impacts, and Mitigation details environmental setting information, Project impacts, and proposed mitigation measures for a wide range of resources. It includes Section 3.1, which provides an overview of the environmental setting, impacts, and mitigation, as well as the assumptions considered as part of the environmental impact analyses. Resource-specific analyses are included in the following sections:
- 3.2 – Aesthetics/Visual
 - 3.3 – Agricultural Resources
 - 3.4 – Air Quality
 - 3.5 – Biological Resources
 - 3.6 – Cultural Resources
 - 3.7 – Energy/Electric Utilities
 - 3.8 – Fire Protection and Emergency Services
 - 3.9 – Geology/Soils
 - 3.10 – Land Use
 - 3.11 – Noise
 - 3.12 – Paleontological Resources
 - 3.13 – Risk of Accidents/Hazardous Materials/Safety
 - 3.14 – Transportation/Circulation
 - 3.15 – Water Resources
 - 3.16 – Other Issue Areas
- Section 4.0: Cumulative Impacts provides a description of the reasonably foreseeable projects located in the vicinity of the Project and the cumulative impacts of these projects in combination with the Project.
- Section 5.0: Alternatives Analysis provides a comparison of the Project impacts with those of Project alternatives developed by the County.
- Section 6.0: Other CEQA Considerations identifies the Project's compliance with other applicable CEQA requirements.
- Section 7.0: List of Persons, Agencies, and Organizations Consulted lists all of the persons, agencies, and organizations consulted relevant to preparation of this EIR.

Section 8.0: List of Preparers identifies the individuals and their roles in preparing this EIR.

Section 9.0: References lists all of the references relevant to preparation of this EIR.