

6.0 Other CEQA Considerations

6.1 Introduction

Section 15126 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines requires that all aspects of a project must be considered when evaluating its impact on the environment. As part of this analysis, the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) must also identify: (1) significant environmental effects of a proposed project; (2) significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if a proposed project is implemented; (3) significant irreversible environmental changes that would result from implementation of a proposed project; (4) growth-inducing impacts of a proposed project; (5) mitigation measures proposed to minimize significant effects; and (6) alternatives to a proposed project.

6.2 Significant Environmental Effects

Table ES-1 (Summary of Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures), which is contained in the Executive Summary of this EIR, and Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this EIR provide a comprehensive identification of the environmental effects of the Lompoc Wind Energy Project (Project), including the level of significance both before and after mitigation.

6.3 Significant Environmental Effects that Cannot Be Avoided

Section 15126.2(b) of the CEQA Guidelines specifies that an EIR describe any significant impacts that cannot be avoided, even with the implementation of feasible mitigation measures. Implementation of the Project would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to visual and biological resources. Construction and operation of wind turbine generators (WTGs) in the westernmost arrays of the Project area would be visible during daytime and nighttime periods to users of Jalama Beach County Park, which is approximately 4.5 miles distant. Based upon the generalized reasonable worst-case analysis (80 WTGs), 3 WTGs would be visible near the base of Tranquillon Mountain, and an estimated 10 would be visible in the southernmost WTG array along the ridgeline. Placement of the power line in the area of State Route 1 would introduce a new series of power poles that would silhouette against the skyline, creating a significant visual impact. However, proposed Power Line Alternative 1 would reduce these impacts to less than significant. Additionally, an unknown number but potentially substantial numbers of protected birds and bats are at risk of dying through collisions with the WTGs over the duration of the Project.

6.4 Significant Irreversible Environmental Effects

Section 15126.2(c) of the CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of any significant irreversible environmental changes that would be caused by the Project. Specifically, Section 15126.2(c) states:

Uses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible, since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also, irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified.

Generally, a project would result in significant irreversible environmental changes if:

- The primary and secondary impacts would generally commit future generations to similar uses
- The project would involve a large commitment of nonrenewable resources
- The proposed consumption of resources is not justified (e.g., the project involves the wasteful use of energy)
- The project involves uses in which irreversible damage could result from any potential environmental accidents associated with the project

Implementation of the Project is expected to result in a 30-year commitment to operating a wind energy generation project on 2,950 acres of agricultural land and a 7.85-mile power line that interconnects with the Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) grid. The Project area is predominantly used for grazing, which could continue unimpeded. It is not known whether the Project would be extended after 30 years. At the end of its useful life, the Project could be "repowered" (that is, WTGs would be replaced, renovated or upgraded), or decommissioned. The decision to decommission or repower would depend on energy economics at the time, technological options, the landowners' willingness to renew the leases with the Project owner, and other considerations.

The Project would develop a renewable source of power, helping to offset the use of nonrenewable resources. Resources that would be consumed as a result of Project implementation include water, electricity, and fossil fuels during construction and operations; however, the amount and rate of consumption of these resources would not result in significant environmental impacts or the unnecessary, inefficient, or wasteful use of resources. Compliance with all applicable building codes, as well as County policies and the mitigation measures identified in this EIR would ensure that all natural resources are conserved to the maximum extent possible. The Project is not expected to result in environmental accidents that would cause irreversible damage. Compliance with required plans, such as a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan, Erosion and Grading Plan, and Hazardous Materials Management Plan, would minimize the potential for accidents resulting in environmental damage. Some birds and bats could be killed through collisions with the WTGs and power line, as well as during construction; however, populations of individual species would not be eliminated, and the impacts to populations would not be irreversible.

6.5 Growth-Inducing Impacts

6.5.1 Background

In accordance with Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must “discuss the ways in which the proposed project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment.” In addition, when discussing growth-inducing impacts of a proposed project, “it must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment” (Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines). Two issues must be considered when assessing the growth-inducing impacts of a project:

- **Elimination of Obstacles to Population Growth:** The extent to which additional infrastructure capacity or a change in regulatory structure would allow additional development in the County and region,
- **Promotion of Economic Growth:** The extent to which a project can cause increased activity in the local or regional economy. Economic impacts can include direct effects, such as the direction and strategies implemented within the area of a project, and indirect or secondary impacts, such as increased commercial activity needed to serve the population growth forecasts by the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments for the project area.

6.5.2 Elimination of Obstacles to Population Growth

The elimination of either physical or regulatory obstacles to population growth is considered to be a growth-inducing impact. A physical obstacle to population growth typically involves the lack of public service infrastructure. The extension of public service infrastructure, including roadways, water mains, and sewer lines, into areas that currently do not have these services is expected to support new development.

The Project would not remove an obstacle to growth and would provide a source of renewable energy to help PG&E meet the California Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), established under Senate Bill (SB) 1078 (SB 1078, Chapter 516, Statutes of 2002), which requires certain retail sellers of electricity, including PG&E, to increase the amount of renewable energy they procure each year by 1 percent until the renewable energy content of their electricity portfolios equals 20 percent. Retail sellers of electricity are required to meet this standard by December 31, 2010. (SB 107, Chapter 464, Statutes of 2006). The Project could offset power generated by a nonrenewable source if it resulted in displacing nonrenewable sources such as natural gas-fired power plants. However, it is likely that the Project’s power generation would increase PG&E’s and California’s overall supplies, which are driven by statewide demand. The new 115-kV power line, not being a distribution line, would interconnect with the PG&E grid but would not serve new development in the Project area directly.

6.5.3 Promotion of Economic Growth

The Project would result in direct economic impacts to the County through employment and the local purchase of some construction materials, as well as secondary impacts from the purchases of goods and services by those employed by the Project. The Project would

not directly or indirectly promote sufficient economic growth to result in a population that would exceed the projections of the Santa Barbara County Association of Governments, however. Only 50 to 100 workers would be required to construct the Project (most of whom are expected to reside in the County), and construction would be completed within a 6- to 10-month period. Up to ten people would be employed at the wind energy facility during operations.

6.6 Mitigation Measures Proposed to Minimize Significant Impacts

Table ES-1 (Summary of Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures), which is contained in the Executive Summary of this EIR, and Sections 3.2 through 3.15 of this EIR provide a comprehensive identification of the environmental impacts of the Project, and identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce the magnitude of impacts.

6.7 Alternatives to the Project

Alternatives to the Project are analyzed in Section 5.0 (Alternatives) of this EIR.