

CHAPTER 4.0

OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 Significant Effects Which Cannot Be Avoided

Section 15126.2(b) of the CEQA Guidelines requires identification of significant environmental effects that cannot be avoided if the proposed project is implemented. As discussed in this EIS/EIR, implementation of the proposed project would not result in any significant impacts which cannot be avoided or mitigated.

4.2 Effects Found To Be Not Significant

CEQA Guidelines Section 15128 requires a brief discussion of various possible significant effects of a project that were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in this EIS/EIR. As stated in *Section 1.0* of this EIS/EIR, an NOP and Initial Study was prepared for the proposed project by the City of Palm Springs and sent out for public review (see *Appendix A*). Based on comments received during the public review period for the Initial Study and public scoping for preparation of the EIS/EIR, the City and BLM identified the following areas for full impact analysis: noise, biological resources, geology and soils, cultural resources, visual resources, and public health and safety. Those issues found not to be significant through the Initial Study process and did not generate concerns are discussed in this section.

Results of the EIS/EIR analysis are presented in *Sections 3.1 through 3.8* and conclude that the project incorporates sufficient environmental commitments to ensure that impacts related to noise, biological resources, geology and soils, cultural resources, and public health and safety would be less than significant.

The following provides a summary of findings presented in the Initial Study and Environmental Assessment for environmental issues which were found to have “no impact” or “less than significant” impact and were therefore not discussed in detail in this EIS/EIR.

Agricultural Resources

No prime, statewide important, unique, or local important farmlands or agricultural preserves are located on-site or on surrounding properties. The proposed project is not located within or adjacent to an agricultural preserve established pursuant to the Williamson Act and is not located within 300 feet of an agriculturally zoned property. In addition, there are no existing agricultural operations or designated agricultural resources located on-site or on surrounding properties, and the project is not directly affected by agriculture programs and land use standards of the Palm Springs General Plan.

Air Quality

The project is not expected to significantly affect air quality as defined by the Air Quality Element of the City's General Plan, and is not expected to exceed threshold criteria of the South Coast Air Quality Management District Air Quality Handbook, 1993. The eastern desert areas of Riverside County are generally non-attainment areas with regard to PM10. The project will create some dust and blowsand during construction and maintenance activities, including the use of gravel based drives and internal roadways. Construction and operation of the project would not result in a significant dust or blowsand source due to applied mitigation, including implementation of the project's Dust Control Plan, the application of 4" to 6" of gravel over compacted native material on internal access roads, and 20 mph speed limits within the project boundaries to be included as conditions of approval or part of project design.

Mineral Resources

According to Figure 5.4 in the City's General Plan EIR, the project site is located within MRZ-2 mineral resources zone. These are areas where adequate information indicates that significant mineral deposits are present, or there is a high likelihood for their occurrence. Such mineral deposits consist primarily of sand and gravel for aggregate and/or decorative stone purposes. The site is not currently being used for mineral extraction, but the proposed uses would not preclude such extractions in the future due to the minimal area of site disturbance, leaving relatively large areas of unimproved or minimally improved land between the turbines and ancillary facilities. The project will retain approximately 97% of the site as open space, and would not preclude limited future mining on-site, or significantly reduce the regional aggregate supply. Consequently, while mineral resources exist at the site, they are not designated as essential for filling the production-consumption needs of the region and since the project preserves much of the property in an undeveloped condition, impacts to mineral resources are considered less than significant.

Population/Housing

The project will not induce substantial population growth or cumulatively exceed official population projections as there is no associated housing component and operation and maintenance of the new wind generation project is only anticipated to result in three permanent full time jobs and twenty part-time jobs for area residents. Therefore, potential impacts to population and housing are considered less than significant.

Public Services

Police Services

Police protection for the project area is provided by the Palm Springs Police Department, located at 200 South Civic Street. The project will develop a wind energy generation facility which is not

expected to increase calls for police services. The project will generate additional property tax revenue to the City which will contribute to the funding of police protection.

Fire Services

The proposed project would result in development of additional structures within the City. However, the proposed wind energy generation facility will consist of non-habitable structures with little risk of fire hazards. Prior to construction, vegetation will be cleared where necessary for maintenance roads and foundations for wind turbines. All remaining trash and debris will be removed from the site, further reducing risk of fires at the site. No significant impacts to City fire protection services are anticipated to occur as a result of project implementation. In addition, the project will generate revenue to the City in the form of property taxes which will benefit fire services.

Schools

The project site is located within the Palm Springs Unified School District (PSUSD). Sources of funding for capital improvements and operations originate with school facilities fees, state funding, and local funding. Pursuant to Section 17625 of the California Education Code, the District is authorized to collect school impact fees from new commercial and industrial construction at the current rate of \$0.36 per square foot of “chargeable covered and enclosed space” (Government Code Section 65995). Chargeable covered and enclosed space, if any, shall be determined by the City Building Department. Since the project will not result in occupied structures and will not generate substantial new employment opportunities, and thus new student generation, little or no impact to the District would occur.

Libraries

The proposed development will not affect county library services as it does not involve a residential component or increase in population.

Health Services

The proposed development will not affect City or County health services as it does not involve a residential component or an increase in population.

Recreation

Palm Springs determines the number of neighborhood and regional parks on a per capita basis. General Plan policy calls for an increase in the supply of parkland in the City, with an aim of providing a minimum of 5 acres of local recreation land, public and private, for each thousand permanent residents. Additional policy requires that developers contribute to provide parks and recreation facilities to offset the demands of new development. Since there is no housing component associated with the proposed project, and there would not be substantial permanent employment generated, it will not increase the population to a level where any new facilities would be required.

Socioeconomics

An *Economic and Fiscal Report* (September 24, 2006, AES Sea West) was prepared for the project to provide an analysis of the economic effects of the project. This report is contained in the appendices to this document as *Appendix G*. The report focuses on impacts of Development Option A, which is the option most likely to be built. The Project will be constructed in approximately six months, and be completed approximately by the spring of 2008. The operational life of the Project is expected to be at least 20 years, after which the project will be decommissioned and removed. As detailed in the fiscal report, the project will contribute substantial revenues to the City of Palm Springs, BLM, County of Riverside, and State of California during its development and operation phases. In addition, these revenue streams will last at least 20-years, as that is the minimum term of the power purchase agreement, the design life of the equipment, and projected project time frame. Upon project termination the project will be decommissioned at no cost to the public. At the same time, little impacts to public services will result from the project, as recent wind projects in Palm Springs have demonstrated that they do not cause significant expenditures for public services, and this wind energy project will not require public services commonly associated with commercial or industrial development. Since the project has no residential component and is expected to produce between three and five permanent full time jobs, there would be no significant impacts on population and housing.

Transportation/Traffic

Traffic associated with the proposed project is anticipated to be minor in nature. During construction, approximately 25 total trips per day are expected. During operation of the wind energy conversion project, an average of about 10 vehicles per day is anticipated, primarily for maintenance purposes. Consequently, the project's incremental contribution on local traffic is not expected to result in any notable short or long-term change to existing levels of service or other operational or safety characteristics of the local circulation system.

Utilities/Service Systems

Water/Sewer

The project will use some water during project construction to control dust, but there will be no long term use of water associated with the project. As discussed above, there will not be any wastewater generation. Consequently, the project would not affect treatment facilities.

Solid Waste

The project will generate a limited amount of solid waste during construction. It is anticipated that the solid waste generated by project construction would have a less than significant impact on local solid waste facilities. The amount of solid waste generated during operation of the proposed project would not be substantial or interfere with the sufficient permitted capacity of nearby landfills.

Impacts would be less than significant. Construction waste will be disposed of by hauling to County solid waste facilities. However, these quantities are anticipated to be minimal (less than 2 tons) and will not significantly affect the County's existing landfill capacities. Since there are no habitable structures proposed for the project, and wind farms are not considered a major generator of solid waste, potential impacts related to solid waste collection or disposal will be less than significant.

Road Maintenance

Heavy trucks and other construction related vehicles may impact local streets on a temporary basis. However, long-term traffic associated with the project will consist of occasional maintenance of facilities and is expected to be minimal and would not result in the need for increased maintenance of affected roadway facilities.

4.3 Cumulative Impacts

Visual Impacts

The proposed project is a continuation of wind farm development in the San Gorgonio Pass, and continues the trend toward fewer, taller turbines. The visual character in the project vicinity is somewhat industrial in nature, containing more than 1,500 wind turbines, including electrical transmission lines and large areas of vacant natural desert terrain. The turbines proposed for this project have been chosen to match the existing turbines in the vicinity. The proposed project would blend in with the existing surroundings and would not substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. The proposed turbines will be state-of-the-art with tubular steel towers supporting a three bladed rotor, designed to rotate clockwise, which is the dominant direction of blade rotation in the pass area. The three bladed turbine has the benefit of a more uniform/rhythmic motion with less of the "flashing" appearance common to two bladed turbine designs. The turbines will be finished in a very light gray off-white color, with a lusterless matte finish, chosen to blend with the sky and surrounding environment. This visual uniformity will aid in minimizing visual clutter and promote a more harmonious appearance.

The proposed project will add more turbines to an already large amount of turbines in the San Gorgonio Pass area. However, citing the reasons stated above, the project would not have a significant cumulative effect on visual resources.

Biological Resources

The proposed project is one of several wind energy facility projects existing or projected for development in the Coachella Valley area. There are presently approximately 3,500 existing turbines covering about 20 square miles within the San Gorgonio Pass and upper Coachella Valley area. In an effort to minimize cumulative impacts, the proposed project has been designed to share access with existing wind projects on adjacent properties. The project will use some of the same

system of roads, electrical lines, transmission lines, substations, operations, and maintenance facilities in use by other wind projects in the area, thereby minimizing cumulative impacts. The development of wind energy facilities in the San Gorgonio Pass is consistent with and encouraged by the Riverside County Comprehensive General Plan and Palm Springs General Plan and has resulted in transforming the character of the area from vacant native desert areas to more industrial in nature.

As determined by the biological analysis in *Section 3.2*, direct and indirect impacts from the proposed combined project are considered to be less than significant with applied mitigation. The project contribution to cumulative impacts will be incremental. They include the following:

- Reduction and loss of plant communities
- Reduction and loss of wildlife habitats
- Increases in indirect impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat.

Specific impacts with regard to reduction and loss of plant communities and wildlife habitats include potential cumulative impacts to the Coachella Valley milkvetch (federally endangered), sand transport which supports the Coachella Valley fringe-toed lizard (federally threatened, state endangered) and other sensitive sand dwelling species and potential for bird collisions with wind turbines. Each of these issues were discussed in detail in *Section 3.2* and were found to be less than significant or less than significant with incorporation of mitigation measures. Therefore, cumulative impacts related to these issues and wildlife habitat in general is also found to be less than significant.

In addition, because wind energy facilities incorporate security fencing, they cumulatively provide protection against many of the impacts that are ongoing on these properties, including illegal trash dumping, illegal trespass (both foot and vehicle traffic) and off-road vehicle use. The cumulative biological impacts of the project are not considered to be significant.

Cultural Resources

Cultural and paleontological resources are localized and generally unique at each site. All significant cultural resources associated with this and other projects would be mitigated on a project-by-project basis, therefore, cumulative impacts to the region's known and yet to be discovered cultural and paleontological resources would not occur.

Geology/Soils

Geotechnical conditions are unique to each site and are not cumulatively related. Approved projects and those under review are subject to soils and stability analysis and cannot be constructed unless each project is determined to be geotechnically feasible. Therefore, no significant cumulative impacts related to geological issues would occur.

Public Health and Safety

Past, current and reasonably foreseeable commercial projects in the region will incrementally result in the use and transport of more oils, greases and petroleum products for operation purposes. Although these could be subject to accidental spillage, there is no quantifiable cumulative effect since accidents are indiscriminate events, not related or contributory to one another. Provided that individual projects adhere to current laws governing storage, transportation and handling of hazardous materials, no significant cumulative hazard or threats to human health and safety are anticipated.

Hydrology and Water Quality

Wind energy projects generally result in very little impermeable surface area, primarily where the turbines themselves are sited. The Mountain View IV Wind Energy project would result in less than 0.02% of impermeable surface area. The vast majority of the site would be in a permeable state and would be able to accommodate runoff. The vast majority of the site would be in a permeable state and would be able to accommodate runoff. Cumulatively, other wind energy projects in the San Gorgonio Pass area similarly have very few impervious surfaces and drainage is allowed throughout the sites. Also, each wind energy project is required to implement a Storm Water Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) in order to mitigate any possible impacts to water quality. Therefore, the cumulative impacts to hydrology and water quality are less than significant.

Noise

The proposed project would incrementally contribute to the cumulative noise impacts of the area by adding more wind turbines to the area. However, residences are located far enough away from the entire San Gorgonio Pass wind energy area that cumulative noise impacts would be less than significant to residences or other sensitive uses.

4.4 Growth Inducing Impacts

Section 15126.2(d) of the CEQA Guidelines requires a discussion of how the potential growth-inducing impacts of the proposed project could foster economic or population growth or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Induced growth is distinguished from the direct employment, population, or housing growth of a project. If a project has characteristics that “may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively,” then these aspects of the project must be discussed as well. Induced growth is any growth that exceeds planned growth and results from new development that would not have taken place in the absence of the proposed project. For example, a project could induce growth by lowering or removing barriers to growth or by creating or allowing a use such as an industrial facility that attracts new population or economic

activity. CEQA Guidelines also indicate that the topic of growth should not be assumed to be either beneficial or detrimental (Section 15126.2[d]).

The proposed project would involve the construction of a wind energy farm consistent with existing land use designations. The project would not involve the development of additional housing or result in direct population growth. Instead, the project would provide electricity that would serve the needs of Southern California Edison customers in Southern California and fulfill Federal and State policies for renewable energy. For the reasons outlined above, the proposed project is not considered to have a significant growth inducing impact.