Consequences of Project Implementation

5.1 Environmental Effects Found To Be Less than Significant

Section 15128 of the State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines requires that an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) “contain a statement briefly indicating the reasons that various possible significant effects of a project were determined not to be significant and were therefore not discussed in detail in the EIR.”

Kern County has engaged the public in the scoping of the environmental document. Comments received during scoping have been considered in the process of identifying issue areas that should receive attention in the EIR. The contents of this EIR were established based on an Initial Study (IS)/Notice of Preparation (NOP) prepared in accordance with the State CEQA Guidelines and on public and agency input received during the scoping process. Issues that were found to have no impact or less-than-significant impacts during preparation of the IS/NOP do not need to be addressed further in this EIR. Based on the findings of the NOP and the results of scoping, a determination was made that the EIR must contain a comprehensive analysis of all environmental issues identified in Appendix G of the CEQA Guidelines.

After further study and environmental review in this EIR, direct and indirect impacts of the proposed project (not including cumulative impacts) would be less than significant or could be reduced to less-than-significant levels with mitigation measures for the following issue areas:

- Agricultural and Forest Resources;
- Geology and Soils;
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions;
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials;
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning;
- Mineral Resources;
- Noise;
- Population and Housing;
- Public Services;
- Transportation and Traffic; and
- Utilities.

5.2 Significant Environmental Effects that Cannot Be Avoided

Section 15126.2(b) of the State CEQA Guidelines requires that the EIR describe any significant impacts, including those that can be mitigated but not reduced to less-than-significant levels. Potential environmental effects of the proposed project and proposed mitigation measures are discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this EIR.

Impacts in the following areas would be significant and unavoidable, even after incorporation of feasible mitigation measures to reduce impacts to the extent feasible:

- Aesthetics;
- Air Quality;
- Biological Resources;
- Cultural Resources; and
- Recreation.
5.3 Significant Irreversible Impacts

Section 15126.2(c) of the State CEQA Guidelines defines an irreversible impact as an impact that uses nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project. Irreversible impacts can also result from damage caused by environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to ensure that such consumption is justified. Buildout of the proposed project would commit nonrenewable resources during project construction and ongoing utility services during project operations. During project operations, water, electricity, oil, gas, and other nonrenewable resources would be consumed. Therefore, an irreversible commitment of nonrenewable resources would occur as a result of long-term project operations. However, assuming that those commitments occur in accordance with the adopted goals, policies, and implementation measures of the Kern County General Plan (KCGP), as a matter of public policy, those commitments have been determined to be acceptable. The KCGP ensures that any irreversible environmental changes associated with those commitments will be minimized.

5.4 Significant Cumulative Impacts

According to Section 15355 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the term *cumulative impacts* “refers to two or more individual effects which, when considered together, are considerable or which compound or increase other environmental impacts.” Individual effects that may contribute to a cumulative impact may be from a single project or a number of separate projects. Individually, the impacts of a project may be relatively minor, but when considered along with impacts of other closely related or nearby projects, including newly proposed projects, the effects could be cumulatively considerable.

This EIR has considered the potential cumulative effects of the proposed project. Impacts for the following issue areas have been found to be cumulatively considerable:

- Aesthetics;
- Air Quality;
- Biological Resources;
- Cultural Resources; and
- Recreation.

5.5 Growth Inducement

The KCGP recognizes that certain forms of growth are beneficial, both economically and socially. Section 15126.2(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines provides the following guidance on growth-inducing impacts: a project is identified as growth inducing if it “could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment.”

Growth inducement can be a result of new development that requires an increase in employment, removes barriers to development, or provides resources that lead to secondary growth. With respect to employment, the proposed project would not induce substantial growth because it would employ a maximum of up to 180 people during construction, a number of who are expected to be based in the nearby areas of California City, Mojave, Tehachapi, Lancaster and/or Palmdale and up to 32
full-time and part-time staff during operation. Therefore, this proposed project would not result in a large increase in employment that would significantly induce growth.

With respect to removing barriers to development, such as through providing access to previously undeveloped areas, the proposed project would involve construction of temporary and permanent roads. As described in Section 3.5, Proposed Project Characteristics, temporary roads would be used during construction to access areas within the proposed project site. Permanent roads would be used during operations to access proposed project facilities for maintenance. Permanent roads would be required to provide access from the proposed project site entrances to substations and wind turbine generators (WTGs). Some of these roads may be removed and restored after initial construction; some may be reduced in size; and others may be maintained at their construction size for the life of the proposed project to allow for crane usage during operations and maintenance. In general, these roads would provide for access to the proposed project site and would not provide access into other areas thereby promoting growth-inducing development. No other development would be anticipated as a result of these roads, and installation of the WTGs would tend to preclude other development from occurring.

While the proposed project would contribute to energy supply, which supports growth, the development of power infrastructure is a response to increased market demand and is not a factor that induces new growth. Kern County planning documents already permit and anticipate a certain level of growth in the area of the proposed project and in the State as a whole, along with attendant growth in energy demand. It is this anticipated growth that drives energy-production projects, not vice versa. The proposed project would supply energy to accommodate and support existing demand and projected growth, but it would not foster any new growth. Therefore, any link between the proposed project and growth in Kern County would be speculative.

In Kerncrest Audubon Society v. Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, the analysis of growth-inducing effects contained in the EIR for the Pine Tree Wind Development Project was challenged. Plaintiffs argued that the discussion was too cursory to provide adequate information about how additional electricity generated by the project would sustain further growth in the Los Angeles area. The court held that the additional electricity that the project would produce was intended to meet the current forecast of growth in the Los Angeles area. As such, the wind development project would not cause growth, and so it was not reasonable to require a detailed analysis of growth-inducing impacts. In addition, EIRs for similar energy projects have contained similarly detailed analyses of growth-inducing impacts. Their conclusions that increasing the energy supply would not create growth has been upheld, because (1) the additional energy would be used to ease the burdens of meeting existing energy demands within and beyond the area of the project; (2) the energy would be used to support already-projected growth; or (3) the factors affecting growth are so multifarious that any potential connection between additional energy production and growth would necessarily be too speculative and tenuous to merit extensive analysis. Thus, as has been upheld in the courts, this level of analysis is sufficient to inform the public and decision makers of the growth-inducing impacts of the proposed project.

5.6 Energy Conservation

In order to assure that energy implications are considered in project decisions, CEQA requires that EIRs include a discussion of the potential energy impacts of proposed projects, with particular emphasis on avoiding or reducing inefficient, wasteful and unnecessary consumption of energy (see
Public Resources Code section 21100(b)(3)). According to Appendix F of the State CEQA Guidelines, the goal of conserving energy implies the wise and efficient use of energy including: (1) decreasing overall per capita energy consumption; (2) decreasing reliance on natural gas and oil; and (3) increasing reliance on renewable energy sources.

The proposed project itself would help achieve this goal because it would develop a renewable source of power, helping to offset the use of nonrenewable resources and contribute to an overall reduction of nonrenewable resources currently used to generate electricity. In addition, Section 4.7 (Greenhouse Gas Emissions) describes effects on greenhouse gas emissions that would be caused by implementation of the proposed project, including a discussion on the effects of the project on energy resources.

Compliance with all applicable building codes, as well as with County policies and proposed measures and mitigation measures identified in this EIR, would ensure that energy is conserved to the maximum extent possible.

As discussed above in Section 5.3, resources that would be consumed as a result of project implementation include water, electricity, and fossil fuels during construction and operation. Additionally, construction would require the manufacture of new materials, some of which would not be recyclable at the end of the proposed project’s lifetime, and the energy required for the production of these materials would also result in an irretrievable commitment of natural resources.

The anticipated equipment, vehicles, and materials required for construction of the proposed project are detailed in Chapter 3 (Project Description). 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.

No increases in inefficiencies or unnecessary energy consumption are expected to occur as a direct or indirect consequence of the proposed project. No mitigation measures above those already present in this EIR would be necessary.