the significant effects of the project might be avoided or mitigated. Comments are most helpful when they suggest additional specific alternatives or mitigation measures that would provide better ways to avoid or mitigate significant environmental effects.

This Draft EIR is being distributed directly to agencies, organizations, and interested groups and persons for comment during a 45-day formal review period in accordance with Section 15087 of the State CEQA Guidelines. The EIR process, including means by which members of the public can comment on the EIR, is discussed further in Section 2.0, Introduction.

1.4 Project Overview

This section describes the local and regional setting, surrounding land uses, project objectives, and proposed project characteristics. The proposed project is described in further detail in Section 3.0, Project Description.

1.4.1 Local and Regional Setting

The proposed project is located in northeastern Kern County at the base of the Tehachapi and Piute mountain ranges within the Sierra Nevada, directly west of the Fremont Valley in the Western Mojave Desert (Figure 1-1). The project area has been heavily impacted by authorized and unauthorized off-highway vehicle (OHV) use and livestock grazing. The BLM’s Jawbone OHV Area is located off Jawbone Canyon Road, to the east of the site. Existing development in the area includes rural access roads, producing and non-producing water wells, cattle ranching and maintenance facilities, and existing meteorological towers (met towers). Water sources include Cottonwood Creek and Butterbredt Springs. The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) is located west of the proposed project site. The distance between the PCT and the project site boundary varies, ranging from 5.5 miles at the northwest corner of the project to 0.8 mile at the southwest corner of the project. The distance from the PCT to the nearest proposed WTG within the project site is 1.7 miles.

Major transportation corridors in the region include State Route (SR) 14 (north–south) and SR 58 (east–west), which intersect about 20 miles south of the project area in the community of Mojave. Population centers within 20 miles of the proposed project site include:
- Community of Lake Isabella (20 miles northwest of the proposed project site);
- City of California City (12 miles southeast of the proposed project site);
- City of Tehachapi (12 miles southwest of the proposed project site);
- Community of Mojave (12 miles south of the proposed project site); and
- Community of Twin Oaks (10 miles west of the proposed project site).

The proposed project site is located entirely within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) 7.5-Minute Series, Cross Mountain Topographic Quadrangle and the Emerald Mountain Topographic Quadrangle. The proposed project is located within Sections 35 and 36 of Township 29 South, Range 35 East; Section 31 of Township 29 South, Range 36 East; Sections 1, 2, 3, 10-16, 21-23, 25, 27, 28, and 33 of Township 30 South, Range 35 East; Sections 6, 7, and 9 of Township 30 South, Range 36 East.

Elevations range between 2,680 and 5,600 feet above mean sea level. Based on database searches and site reconnaissance efforts conducted during February 2011, the proposed project site consists
of a number of woodland, mixed woodland habitats, scrub communities, and riparian scrub communities.

1.4.2 Surrounding Land Uses

Several residences exist near the proposed project site; however, none of these residences are located within the project boundary. Two residences are located in Kelso Valley, within 1/2 mile west of the proposed project site. The closest residence is 3,215 feet west from the nearest WTG. The minimum distance between the proposed regional Wilderness transmission line reinforcement and a residence would be 1,000 feet. A few residences, which appear to be used for hunting or other recreation, are located in the southern portion of Kelso Valley, 1½ miles northeast of Weldon Peak along Jawbone Canyon Road.

There are several existing, permitted, and proposed wind energy and transmission projects in the region. The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) Pine Tree Wind Project, which is now fully online, is located immediately south of the proposed project site (access to the proposed project site is off SR 14 via Jawbone Canyon Road, which also serves the Pine Tree Wind Project). The Alta-Oak Creek Mojave Wind Project, located 14 miles south of the proposed project site, was approved by Kern County in December 2009 and is currently under construction. The 300-MW PdV Wind (recently referred to as Manzanita Wind) Project and the 151-MW Pacific Wind Projects are located 25 miles south of the proposed project site. In addition, NextEra owns and operates the existing 77 MW Sky River wind energy facility located immediately south of the southwest portion of the proposed project site.

1.4.3 Project Objectives

North Sky River Energy, LLC has defined seven objectives for the proposed project:

1. Make a significant contribution toward achieving the California RPS goal that 33 percent of electricity be generated by renewable energy by 2020;
2. Maximize energy production and economic viability by locating the project in an area with optimal wind and solar resources and terrain characteristics;
3. Optimize the use of underused and undeveloped land within the Tehachapi Wind Resources Area;
4. Increase local short-term and long-term employment opportunities;
5. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing a long-term alternative means of energy to conventional fossil fuels;
6. Use state-of-the-art WTG technology to achieve increased performance, lower cost, higher reliability, and longer service life; and
7. Produce electricity without the need for large amounts of water in relation to conventional means (1/600 as much water per unit of electricity produced compared with nuclear and 1/500 as much as coal).

Jawbone Wind Energy, LLC has identified nine objectives that are important to achieving the proposed project goal:

1. Provide an 39-MW project generating 100,000 MWh per year of electricity, in California, through optimization of renewable energy sources;
2. Supply renewable energy that will help the State of California meet its goals by reducing reliance on energy generated from fossil fuels;
3. Provide property tax revenues to Kern County;
4. Assist Kern County in promoting its role as the State’s leading renewable energy producer;
5. Provide green jobs to Kern County and the State of California;
6. Realize the full potential of the wind resource;
7. Result in an economically feasible renewable energy project that would be developed through commercially available financing;
8. Supply clean, safe, renewable energy for 9,000 homes; and

1.4.4 Proposed Project Characteristics

Major components of the proposed project include the following.

- Up to a maximum of 116 WTGs not to exceed 500 feet in height with associated generators, towers, foundations, and pad mounted transformers (each WTG could range from 1 MW to 3 MW), for a total generation capacity not to exceed 339 MW of electricity;
- Four existing and up to four additional unguyed permanent met towers (North Sky River Wind Energy Project);
- Four temporary met towers (Jawbone Wind Energy Project);
- On-site and off-site project access roads, control cables, power collection cables, and transmission lines necessary to serve the proposed project and connect to the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) grid;
- One project substation to step up the voltage generated by the WTG to meet the electrical transmission system’s 230-kV voltage;
- Two O&M facility areas (North Sky River Wind Energy Project – 5 acres; Jawbone Wind Energy Project – 6.5 acres);
- Two remote staging/office trailers; and
- One temporary portable concrete batch plant.

1.5 Environmental Impacts

1.5.1 Impacts Not Further Considered in this EIR

As discussed in Appendix A (Notice of Preparation/Initial Study), the proposed project was determined to have no impact with regard to the following impact thresholds, which are therefore not analyzed in this EIR.

Agricultural and Forest Resources

- Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use;
- Involve other changes in the existing environment which, because of their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use; and
- Result in the cancellation to an open space contract made pursuant to the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 or Farmland Security Zone Contract for any parcel of 100 or more acres (Section 15206(b)(3) Public Resources Code).