Pacific Crest Trail Planning Criteria

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan (USDA Forest Service, 1982) and the Pacific Crest Trail Guide for Location, Design, and Management (USDA Forest Service, 1971) provide guidelines and criteria for design and location of the PCT. Specifically, these guidelines state that the most desirable location will avoid unattractive roads, mining areas, power and telephone lines, commercial and industrial developments, fences, and other features incompatible with the natural condition of the trail, and with its use for outdoor recreation. Where the trail encounters such developments, it should be located so as not to adversely affect, or conflict with, the purpose of the development. Natural vegetation, topography, or natural plantings shall be used, where possible, to screen objectionable features from the view of the trail user.

Local

Kern County General Plan (KCGP)

The KCGP contain policies, goals, and implementation measures that are general in nature and not specific to development such as the proposed project. Therefore, they are not listed below, but, as stated in Chapter 2, “Introduction,” all policies, goals, and implementation measures in the KCGP are incorporated by reference.

Kern County Zoning Ordinance

The Wind Energy (WE) Combining District (Chapter 19.64) contains development standards and conditions (Section 19.64.140) that would be applicable to the siting and operation of wind turbine generators (WTGs). The following provisions apply to recreation issues related to the proposed project.

Chapter 19.64 Wind Energy (WE) Combining District

19.64.140 Development Standards and Conditions

- **Setback From Public Highways and Streets, Public Access Easements, Public Trails, and Railroads.** A minimum wind generator setback of one and one-half (1 1/2) times the overall machine height (measured from grade to the top of the structure, including the uppermost extension of any blade) shall be maintained from any publicly maintained public highway or street. A minimum wind generator setback of one (1) times the overall machine height shall be maintained from any public access easement or railroad right-of-way. A minimum wind generator setback of one hundred fifty feet (150) shall be maintained from the outermost extension of any blade to any public trail, pedestrian easement, or equestrian easement.

4.15.4 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

Methodology

Recreational facilities and opportunities in the area were evaluated to determine whether they would be adversely affected by the project. This evaluation included consideration of the overall number and area of parklands or other recreational facilities and proximity to the project.
Thresholds of Significance

The Kern County CEQA Implementation Document and Kern County Environmental Checklist state that a project would have a significant impact on recreation if it would:

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated; or
- Include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities that might have an adverse physical effect on the environment.

As discussed in Appendix A (Notice of Preparation/Initial Study [NOP/IS]), the proposed project was determined to have no impact with regard to the following impact threshold:

- Increase the use of existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated.

This issue is not discussed further in this EIR.

Project Impacts

Impact 4.15-1: Include Recreational Facilities or Require Construction or Expansion of Recreational Facilities that Might Have an Adverse Physical Effect on the Environment

The project does not include construction or expansion of any recreational facilities. As proposed, the project would require a peak construction workforce of up to approximately 150 workers for the North Sky River Wind Energy Project components and up to approximately 30 workers for the Jawbone Wind Energy Project components, which represents a minimal increase in employment over the construction period given the project area’s existing population. Construction workers are expected to travel to the site from various locations throughout Southern California, and the number of workers expected to relocate to the surrounding area is not expected to be substantial. If temporary housing should be necessary, it is expected that accommodations would be available in the nearby cities of Tehachapi, California City, Lancaster, Palmdale, and the communities of Mojave and Rosamond. Any construction workers that relocate to these areas may use the neighborhood and regional parks in the vicinity of the project site. Given that there are several parks in the project vicinity, including the large Tehachapi Mountain Park, the limited addition of people to the area, and the short-term duration of construction, the potential temporary demand for recreational facilities would not require the construction or expansion of facilities or result in a detectable physical deterioration of parks.

Operation of the projects would require long-term staff of up to 32 individuals, 20 for the North Sky River Wind Energy Project and 12 for the Jawbone Wind Energy Project. It is expected that some of these individuals would already reside in the area and operation of the project would not result in a substantial influx of people (such as a new residential development, school, or other use that would result in large volumes of people residing or traveling to the project area). The KCGP requires 2.5 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents (PRD, 2010). Currently, the ratio of parkland to residents is five acres per 1,000 residents (PRD, 2010). Therefore, an increase of up to 32 individuals and their families would not cause this ratio to be exceeded.

Although the proposed project would not result in construction or expansion of any recreational facilities, construction of the project would alter the existing character of the project site, and
therefore may affect recreational uses of the site as a result of the altered viewshed; increased noise, altered airplane or glider routes, traffic on Jawbone Canyon Road, and possible safety concerns.


The PCT, which roughly parallels the western side of the project site (as shown on Figure 3-1), is designated as a National Scenic Trail; therefore, viewers’ expectations for scenery and natural views are high. 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 WTG within the project site is 1.7 miles.

The project would alter the existing character of the site. Key Observation Point (KOP)-4 (see Figure 4.1-5 presented in Section 4.1 of this EIR) has high overall visual sensitivity and includes views of WTGs dominating the middleground. Additionally, portions of the PCT would be crossed by project transmission lines. Some users of this particular section of the trail have been known to be attracted to the view of the WTGs visible from the PCT (Gipe, 2009b). However, because of the significant alteration in the viewshed, particularly as viewed from the PCT, the visual impact is considered significant and unavoidable.

Scattered red lights required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) on WTGs would alter the relatively unobstructed night sky, resulting in a significant aesthetic impact for campers or night hikers. Site preparation and construction activities would temporarily increase noise levels, disrupting the level of sound that trail users are accustomed to hearing. Noise-generating construction activities associated with transmission lines and transmission reinforcement, primarily from heavy-duty construction equipment, would be limited to daylight hours Monday through Saturday.

The USDA Forest Service maintains a 20-foot easement for the PCT through the project site to provide access. Kern County Zoning Ordinance 19.64.140 requires a minimum 150-foot setback from the outermost extension of any blade to any public trail, pedestrian easement, or equestrian easement. In conformance with the Kern County Zoning Ordinance, the project proponents have designed the project so that all transmission facilities and transmission reinforcement are set back 150 feet from the edges of the trail. This would prevent the project from physically disturbing the trail. However, the project would affect the recreational experience of the PCT because it would affect the viewshed, increase noise, and could pose a potential safety concern. Permanent noise increases along the PCT include transmission line corona noise, although as described in Section 4.12, “Noise”, the impacts of corona noise would be less than significant. These issues are addressed in Sections 4.1, “Aesthetics,” 4.12, “Noise,” and 4.8, “Hazards and Hazardous Materials,” respectively. The trail would not be closed during construction; therefore, use of the trail would not be prevented.

It should be noted that while the trail should be within the 20-foot-wide federal easement, at some locations the trail may deviate from the legal location because of physical use (e.g., hikers going off the trail and changing the route). In this event, the County interprets adherence to the Zoning Ordinance to mean 150 feet from both edges of the trail.

While project components would be located outside of the Jawbone OHV Area, access to the project site for construction and operational traffic on Jawbone Canyon Road would affect recreational use of the Jawbone OHV Area. Jawbone Canyon Road through the Open Area is a rural road with little signage or other traffic control features. Off-road vehicle users of all ages frequent
the open area. High recreation use periods include holiday weekends as well as most fall and winter weekends. Project-related traffic may result in conflicts with OHV use in the Open Area. While OHV users are not permitted on Jawbone Canyon Road, OHVs crossing Jawbone Canyon Road could pose a hazard for both OHV users as well as project personnel. During the 10-12 month construction period, a peak construction workforce of up to 180 workers as well as heavy construction equipment and material traveling to the project site would result in a substantially increased hazard for OHV users, particularly during high recreation use periods. As operational traffic would be largely limited to the 32 full-time project personnel, 20 for the North Sky River Wind Energy Project and 12 for the Jawbone Wind Energy Project, this would not represent a substantial increase in traffic on Jawbone Canyon Road and would not pose a substantially increased hazard to OHV users. Therefore, operation would have little effect on the Jawbone Canyon Road area. The impacts associated with construction traffic on Jawbone Canyon OHV use; however, would be a significant, though temporary and intermittent impact. The implementation of Mitigation Measure (MM) 4.16-1 would require limitations to construction traffic on holidays, such as New Years, Memorial Day, Labor Day, Thanksgiving, and Christmas, Saturday/Sunday travel, and during times of darkness. MM 4.16-1 would also require warning signage, consultation with the Friends of Jawbone and other recreation groups, the BLM, the Kern County Roads Department, and public information and notification of the traffic plan.

Additionally, indirect impacts could occur to recreational OHV use if conservation lands for the mitigation of impacts to Mohave ground squirrel, as described in MM 4.4-13, are purchased in areas currently designated for OHV use. While these impacts would be adverse, without more specific information on the location of conservation lands to be purchased, assuming that MM 4.4-13 would take lands designated for OHV recreation out of use, analysis of such impacts would be speculative. The CEQA Guidelines (Section 15145) states that if a lead agency finds the analysis of a particular impact is too speculative for evaluation, the agency should note its conclusion and terminate discussion of the impacts.

**Mitigation Measures**

Implement Mitigation Measure 4.16-1 as described in Section 4.16, Transportation and Traffic and Mitigation Measure 4.15-1, below.

**MM 4.15-1** The project proponents shall site all wind turbine generators and associated infrastructure other than roads or collector cable lines with a minimum setback of 150 feet from both edges of the Pacific Crest Trail, or otherwise noted by the final noise analysis. The setback shall be clearly delineated on all applicable site plans submitted prior to issuance of grading or building permits.

**Level of Significance**

Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.

**Cumulative Setting Impacts and Mitigation Measures**

**Cumulative Setting**

The geographic scope for cumulative impacts to recreation resources includes the area within 6 miles of the project site. While projects in a larger area may affect some of the same recreation resources as the proposed project, by focusing on projects within 6 miles of the project site, the
analysis of cumulative impacts can be made on those projects that would most comparably affect the same resources as the proposed project.

**Impact 4.15-2: Contribute to Cumulative Recreation Impacts**

With regard to projects resulting in increased use of parks, the proposed project’s impact would be minimal due to the small number of permanent employees working on-site and the temporary nature of the larger number of workers involved in construction of the project. The proposed project’s contribution to increased park usage would be negligible, and would, therefore, not combine with impacts from cumulative projects to result in a significant impact.

With regard to adverse effects to the recreational experience of the PCT, the proposed project would have significant and unavoidable impacts. Several of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects listed in Section 3.11 of this EIR would result in similar impacts to the PCT as the proposed project through adverse changes to the viewshed observable from the PCT as well as increased noise. Therefore, impacts of the proposed project would combine with impacts from cumulative projects to result in a significant impact.

The impact of the proposed project on the recreational experience of OHV users in the region would be less than significant. With the exception of the Pine Tree Wind Project, none of the past, present, and reasonably foreseeable projects listed in Section 3.11 are located within close proximity of this OHV area. The Pine Tree Wind Project is currently operational and does not contribute substantial traffic to area roads and does not substantially restrict or otherwise impact OHV use; therefore impacts of the proposed project would not have the potential to combine with impacts of other projects to result in a cumulative impact related to substantial restriction of OHV use.

With regard to the construction or expansion of new parks, the proposed project would result in no impact. Therefore, impacts of the proposed project would not have the potential to combine with impacts from cumulative projects to result in a significant impact.

**Mitigation Measures**

Implement Mitigation Measure 4.16-1 as described in Section 4.16, Transportation and Traffic and Mitigation Measure 4.15-1.

**Level of Significance after Mitigation**

Impacts would be significant and unavoidable.