

Notice of Availability of a Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Sand Hill Wind Project

SUMMARY:

Notice is hereby given by the County of Alameda, Community Development Agency, Planning Department, as the lead agency pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), that the above-named draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) is available for public review and comment. This EIR addresses the Sand Hill Wind Project, a proposed wind generation facility repowering project (the replacement of older generation wind turbines with new turbines).

Comments on the DEIR will be received for a 45-day period, commencing on November 8, 2013 and ending at 5:00 p.m. on December 23, 2013, after which a final EIR will be prepared containing comments and responses to comments that, together with the DEIR, will form the final EIR. The final EIR will be used by the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments in its consideration of approval of the requested Conditional Use Permit (CUP) for the first phase of the proposed Sand Hill Wind Project (the Initial Repower), described below, and for subsequent consideration of a separate CUP (in the future, not at the present time) for its second phase (Full Repower).

PROJECT LOCATION:

The project would be located within the Alameda County portion of the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA), in eastern Alameda County, bisected by Interstate I-580. The Initial Repower involves replacement of an estimated 73 existing wind turbines on approximately 1,000 acres within seven parcels in three separate areas of the APWRA (the Initial Repower). The subject parcels are within one to two miles of each other, including: three west parcels north of I-580 on both sides of Altamont Pass Road and about a mile west of Grant Line Road (Assessor Parcel Numbers [APNs] 99B-7750-6-0, 99B-6325-1-3, 99B-7375-1-7); two northeast parcels east of Mountain House Road about a mile north of I-580 (99B-7500-3-1 and 99B-7600-1-1) and two southeast parcels east of North Midway Road about a mile south of I-580 (99B-7875-1-2 and 99B-7875-1-3). The second phase of the project (Full Repower), subject to a separate CUP, would include another parcel adjacent to the west parcels (APN 99B-6325-1-4).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

The proposed project consists of two phases: the Initial Repower and the Full Repower, using a new wind turbine technology referred to as shrouded turbines. The Initial Repower, the subject of the CUP application currently under consideration, would replace between 70 and 80 of the existing 1980s-'90s-era turbines on the project parcels with 40 new shrouded turbines and retain in place for at least one year the remaining 330 to 340 older turbines. The purpose of the Initial Repower is to facilitate an Avian Validation Study that proposes to test and demonstrate how the new shrouded wind technology would be compatible with avian species use in the project area, and compare the effects on avian safety in the APWRA between the shrouded turbines and the older turbines.

The Avian Validation Study is primarily funded by a Public Interest Energy Research (PIER) Grant from the California Energy Commission (CEC) and undertaken under the guidance of the Alameda County Scientific Review Committee. The Study is an ongoing, 3-year, Before-After-Control-Impact (BACI)-type study that commenced in April 2012 in the form of a twice-weekly fatality survey of the existing 1980s-'90s-era turbines, and it will evaluate the extent to which the shrouded turbines could reduce impacts on birds compared to the existing turbines. The Avian Validation Study and turbine performance data will be used by the Applicant to inform its approach to repowering the remainder of the existing turbines under the Full Repower phase.

The Initial Repower would involve the complete decommissioning of 70-80 wind turbines and their replacement with 40 shrouded turbines of equal total capacity (approximately 4 MW) in 2014. In concept, the Full Repower would aim to decommission the estimated 320-330 additional existing wind turbines within the same project area – including the eighth parcel – with up to 300 new shrouded turbines and supporting infrastructure by 2017. After review of the Avian Validation Study's results, the Full Repower would be the subject of an anticipated future request by the Applicant for a separate CUP. The Full Repower would aim to completely repower the project parcels with an economically viable wind energy project in a proven wind resource area, by providing 30 MW of additional generating capacity, for a total nameplate capacity of 34 MW. As with the existing wind energy generation facilities, the proposed Sand Hill repower facilities would coexist with ongoing ranching activities on the subject parcels.

The Initial Repower is evaluated at a project level in the DEIR. The Full Repower, is not currently under application and would be subject to a separate CUP and any additional environmental review required under CEQA. It is therefore evaluated at a programmatic level in this DEIR.

ANTICIPATED SIGNIFICANT ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS:

The DEIR's analysis of Initial Repower project impacts identifies significant impacts on specific aspects of aesthetics; air quality; biological resources; cultural resources; geology, soils, and paleontological resources; hydrology and water quality; noise; and transportation and traffic. Certain of these impacts would be less than significant after mitigation is implemented.

The DEIR's programmatic analysis of Full Repower impacts identified individual impacts that were similar to the Initial Repower on the same considerations, but with substantially greater magnitude, and indicated that these impacts would also be less than significant after mitigation is implemented.

Certain environmental impacts of the Initial Repower on aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, greenhouse gases, and transportation/traffic were determined to be *significant and unavoidable*, including substantial adverse effects on a scenic vista, the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings, cumulatively considerable net increases of certain criteria pollutants (ozone precursors and greenhouse gases, in excess of quantitative thresholds) during the construction period, direct impacts on special-status avian species, traffic impacts on local and regional routes in the project vicinity during construction that would exceed local standards and congestion management program level-of-service standards, potential increases in hazards due to construction-related traffic, including designated bicycle routes and during special cycling-sport events.

The same environmental impacts on aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, greenhouse gases, and transportation/traffic were determined to be *significant and unavoidable* for the Full Repower. In both cases of the Initial and Full Repower, mitigation measures would reduce these specific impacts, but would not avoid them altogether.

PUBLIC REVIEW PROCESS:

One of the purposes of CEQA is to inform the public of the likely environmental consequences of public and private projects such as the proposed Sand Hill Wind Project. The purpose of this Notice, consistent with Sections 15086 and 15087 of the State CEQA Guidelines is to consult with and request comments on the DEIR's environmental analyses from responsible agencies, organizations, Native American tribes, and interested parties.

The DEIR is available for review during normal business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), Monday through Friday, at the Alameda County Community Development Agency, Planning Department, at 224 West Winton Avenue, Room 111, Hayward, California, 94544. The DEIR is also available for viewing at the Livermore Public Library, Civic Center Branch, 1188 South Livermore Avenue, Livermore, CA 94550, from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Friday; 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Saturday and 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Sunday.

The DEIR is also available for review or download at the Alameda County website (www.acgov.org/cda/planning —select “Pending Land Use Projects” - “Current Development Projects” - “Wind Turbine Projects” and “Sand Hill Wind Project”), and at the website of the Altamont Pass SRC (www.altamontsrc.org). Comments on the DEIR may be submitted to:

Sandra Rivera, Assistant Planning Director
ATTN: Sand Hill Wind Project EIR
Alameda County Community Development Agency
224 W. Winton Avenue, Room 111
Hayward, CA 94544

Please include a return address and contact name with your written comments. Comments can also be sent via email with subject line “Sand Hill Wind Project EIR” to: sandra.rivera@acgov.org.

Although CEQA does not require formal hearings at any stage of the environmental review process (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15202[a]), it does encourage “wide public involvement, formal and informal...in order to receive and evaluate public reactions to environmental issues” (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15201) and requires the lead agency to provide the public with the opportunity to provide comments. The County, as lead agency, circulated an NOP of a DEIR (SCH # 2013032016) for the proposed project on March 6, 2013. The NOP was distributed for a 30-day comment period that ended on April 6, 2013. In addition, the County held a public scoping meeting on March 13, 2013, to solicit input on the scope and focus of the EIR. Comments received on the NOP and during the public scoping meeting were considered in the preparation of the EIR. Appendix A of the DEIR contains the NOP, written comments received on the NOP, and a transcript of the public scoping meeting.

The DEIR incorporates public and agency responses to the NOP. Like the NOP, the DEIR is being circulated for review and comment by appropriate agencies, as well as organizations and individuals who have requested notification. In accordance with Section 15205(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines, the County has scheduled a 45-day public review period for the DEIR, ending on December 23, 2013 at 5:00 p.m. Within that 45-day period, the County will hold one public hearing to request comments on the DEIR, at the following time and place.

Thursday, December 19, 2013, 1:30 p.m.
Meeting of the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments
City of Pleasanton Council Chambers
200 Old Bernal Avenue, Pleasanton

The meeting facilities will be accessible to persons with disabilities. If special translation or signing services or other special accommodations are needed, please contact Maria Palmeri at 510-670-5400 or maria.palmeri@acgov.org at least 48 hours before the meeting.

Following the close of the public review period for the DEIR, the County will prepare a final EIR, incorporating all comments received during the public comment period, for consideration by the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments (EBZA) tentatively scheduled for Thursday, March 27, 2014. As required by CEQA (Section 21092.5), the final EIR, including written responses to the comments submitted by public agencies, will be available at least 10 days prior to certification.