

DOCKETED

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair David Hochschild
Vice Chair Siva Gunda
Commissioner Noemí Otilia Osuna Gallardo
Commissioner J. Andrew McAllister, Ph.D.
Commissioner Nancy Skinner

FROM: Drew Bohan, Executive Director

SUBJECT: Executive Director's Recommendation on Soda Mountain Solar, LLC Opt-In Application for the Soda Mountain Solar Project (24-OPT-03)

DATE: March 27, 2026

I. Introduction

Public Resources Code section 25545.6 and California Code of Regulations, title 20, section 1879(c) require the California Energy Commission's (CEC) Executive Director to file a recommendation, concurrent with the updated Staff Assessment, on whether the CEC should certify the environmental impact report and issue a certificate for the construction and operation of the facility. This memorandum sets forth my recommendation to the CEC.

The Soda Mountain Solar, LLC, Opt-In Application for the Soda Mountain Solar Project (24-OPT-03) (proposed project) seeks to construct and operate a utility-scale solar photovoltaic electrical generating facility, a substation, a generation-intertie line, and a battery energy storage system on approximately 2,670 acres in San Bernardino County on land controlled by the federal Bureau of Land Management.

On December 29, 2025, CEC staff filed a Staff Assessment for the project. The Staff Assessment included an analysis of the project's engineering and its consistency with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, plans, policies, and regulations, including mandatory provisions required for projects under the Opt-In Certification Program, as well as a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR), prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (TN 268059).

In the draft EIR, the CEC identified that the proposed project, as submitted, had significant, unavoidable environmental impacts on visual resources and biological resources. As required by CEQA, CEC staff analyzed three alternatives to the project. CEC staff concluded the Bighorn Sheep Buffer and Relocated Battery Energy Storage System Alternative #2 was the environmentally superior alternative compared to the proposed project. This alternative would still cause significant, unavoidable impacts to visual resources but would, with mitigation incorporated into

the project, no longer cause significant impacts to biological resources, particularly related to bighorn sheep. CEC staff found, on balance, the project's significant impacts to visual resources are outweighed by the project's benefits, such as providing a new source of energy storage; contributing to the diversity of renewable generation; contributing to the state's electrical grid reliability by providing renewable electricity during increased load demand; and providing economic benefits to San Bernardino County. CEC staff thus recommended that the CEC issue a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the significant and unavoidable impacts to visual resources, and adopt the Bighorn Sheep Buffer and Relocated Battery Energy Storage System Alternative #2 and issue a certification to construct and operate a facility consistent with the aforementioned alternative.

II. Recommendation

Based on the entire record of this proceeding, including the Opt-In Application and Updated Staff Assessment, I recommend the CEC:

1. Certify the Final Environmental Impact Report included within the Updated Staff Assessment, adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations as set forth in the Staff Assessment in Section 11, Override Findings and Recommendations.
2. Issue the Soda Mountain Solar Project a certificate to construct and operate the facility as described under the Bighorn Sheep Buffer and Relocated Battery Energy Storage System Alternative #2.