

DOCKETED

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**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Energy Resources Conservation
and Development Commission**

In the Matter of:)
)
Application for Certification for the) Docket No. 21-AFC-02
Willow Rock Energy Storage Center)
)
_____)

**WILLOW ROCK ENERGY STORAGE CENTER
STATUS REPORT NO. 10**

Pursuant to the *Committee Scheduling Order* (“Scheduling Order”) docketed August 31, 2022,¹ GEM A-CAES LLC (“the Applicant”) hereby submits this status report to inform the Committee regarding the progress of the Application for Certification (“AFC”) proceeding for the Willow Rock Energy Storage Center (“Willow Rock”).

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES SURVEYS

The Applicant has been diligently engaged in conducting the biological resources surveys during the spring season. Since the commencement of the spring biological survey window, the Applicant has conducted an estimated 525 hours of field surveys. Currently, the Project Applicant has three senior biologists and eight field assistants that have provided biological resources assistance. All work has been directly supervised by a senior biologist on every day of field work. This detailed professional field survey work will form the bases for the biological resources reports prepared based on those field surveys. Additional literature research and review is also ongoing. A summary of the status of each survey is provided below.

Vegetation/ Sensitive Plants:

- The next round of vegetation surveys will commence the week of June 19th.
- Surveys should be completed by the end of the month.

Desert Tortoise

- Surveys have been completed.
- The species is considered absent from the site.

Mohave Ground Squirrel

- To date, there has been no sign of Mohave Ground squirrel.
- The final round of surveys is currently underway to complete the protocol.

¹ TN#: 245754.

Crotch's Bumble Bee

- Due to weather, vegetation bloomed later in the year than normal.
- Weather has been delaying surveys for the Crotch's bumble bee.
- Surveys and monitoring remain ongoing.

Swainson's Hawk

- The first survey of the fourth round of surveys was completed June 7th.
- The fifth round will only include monitoring the active Swainson's Hawk nest.
- Active monitoring is being conducted, which will include three one-hour in-field surveys to monitor the individual nest. The Swainson's Hawk nest occurs in the same location as that originally identified in the AFC.

Burrowing Owl

- Surveys remain ongoing.
- The second round of surveys occurred in the second week of June.

The Applicant anticipates that all surveys will be completed by the end of July, unless the weather or other environmental conditions require otherwise.

GEOTECHNICAL PROGRAM

On August 25, 2022, the Kern County Planning Commission approved Conditional Use Permit ("CUP") 123, Map No. 231, Modification No. 1, authorizing short-term geotechnical data collection activities for the Willow Rock Energy Storage Center for nine (9) months from the date of approval of Modification No. 1.

The activities authorized by the CUP are completed. On June 23, 2023, the Applicant will docket the lab results from testing of the cores obtained through the drilling program at the site. The lab results indicate that the site geology is more optimal for a shallower cavern that would require different engineering than proposed in the AFC.

In response to the County's letter docketed on June 1, 2023 (TN #: 250431), the Applicant verbally confirmed compliance with conditions of approval 5(u) through 5(w), and submitted supporting photographs on June 21, 2023 to the County. The written report required by condition of approval 5(x) is underway and will be submitted to the County on or before June 24, 2023.

PROJECT OPTIMIZATION

On May 31, 2023, the Applicant submitted responses to Intervenor California Unions for Reliable Energy ("CURE") Data Requests Set 2. In addition, on June 5, 2023, Counsel for the Applicant and Counsel for CURE had a productive meet and confer conversation on CURE's Data Requests, the Applicant's responses, and the continuing applicability of the *Joint Statement by CEC Staff, Applicant, and Intervenor re Data Requests* (TN#: 248337). The Applicant appreciates the collegial and professional nature of the meet and confer discussions.

Project optimization efforts are ongoing. As reported in the Applicant's last Status Report, the Applicant is actively considering alternative surface facility configurations, cavern engineering options given the site geotechnical results, and alternate sites that may better support the cavern design. Alternative sites include adjacent and offsite properties in the area with potentially more favorable geologic conditions.

Unrelated to project permitting, the Applicant and its affiliated companies remain actively involved and engaged in other facets of energy policy development in California, including in proceedings before and discussions with the California Public Utilities Commission, the California Independent System Operator, the Legislature, and the Governor's Office. The project is also nearing conclusion of its Large Generator Interconnection Agreement, and in addition to its recently executed 25-year Energy Storage Agreement for 200 MW of the project output with Central Coast Community Energy, is in active negotiations for offtake of the balance of the facility's capacity. The Applicant thanks the Commission for its continuing leadership to advance Long Duration Energy Storage.

Dated: June 21, 2023

Respectfully Submitted,

ELLISON, SCHNEIDER HARRIS & DONLAN LLP

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