

DOCKETED	
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Notice of Availability and Opportunity to Comment Preliminary Staff Assessment for the Proposed Morton Bay Geothermal Project (23-AFC-01)

Para Español:

<https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/GetDocument.aspx?tn=257478&DocumentContentId=93354>

June 27, 2024

This notice is to inform you of the availability of the Preliminary Staff Assessment (PSA) for the Morton Bay Geothermal Project (MBGP) Application for Certification (23-AFC-01) published on June 27, 2024, and the opportunity to provide public comments on the PSA (comment instructions and deadline appear below). The PSA contains the California Energy Commission (CEC) staff's preliminary engineering, environmental, and public health and safety evaluation of the proposed MBGP. The PSA provides staff's analyses in the areas of Air Quality; Alternatives; Biological Resources; Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions; Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources; Efficiency and Energy Resources; Environmental Justice; Facility Design; Facility Reliability; Geology, Paleontology and Minerals; Hazards, Hazardous Materials/Waste, and Wildfire; Land Use, Agriculture, and Forestry; Noise and Vibration; Public Benefits; Public Health; Socioeconomics; Solid Waste Management; Transmission Line Safety and Nuisance; Transmission System Engineering; Transportation; Visual Resources; Water Resources; and Worker Safety and Fire Protection.

This PSA is not a decision document for these proceedings, nor does it contain findings of the CEC related to environmental impacts or the project's compliance with local, state, and federal laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS). After allowing for a public comment period and holding a workshop to receive comments on this PSA, staff will prepare and publish a Final Staff Assessment that will serve as staff's formal testimony in evidentiary hearings to be held by the CEC Committee assigned to conduct this Application for Certification (AFC) proceeding. The Committee will hold evidentiary hearings and will consider the information and recommendations presented by the staff, applicant, intervenors, government agencies, California Native American tribes, and the public, prior to issuing its proposed decision for consideration by the CEC. The CEC will make the final decision, including findings, following a comment period on the Committee's proposed decision.

Summary of the Proposed Project

On April 18, 2023, the applicant, Morton Bay Geothermal, LLC, a subsidiary of BHE Renewables, LLC (BHER) filed an AFC (23-AFC-01) with the CEC to construct and operate the MBGP.

The MBGP generating facility would be on 51 acres of a 160-acre parcel in unincorporated Imperial County, bounded by McDonald Road to the north, Davis Road to the east, Schrimpf Road to the south, and the Salton Sea to the immediate west. The town of Niland is approximately four miles to the northeast and the town of Calipatria is approximately six miles southeast from the project site.

The MBGP would have a maximum continuous rating of approximately 157 megawatts (MW) gross, with an expected net output of roughly 140 MW. The project includes geothermal production wells, pipelines, fluid and steam handling facilities, a solids' handling system, a Class II surface impoundment, a service water pond, a stormwater retention basin, process fluid injection pumps, a power distribution center, borrow pits, and injection wells. The main components of MBGP include a steam turbine generator system, geothermal fluid processing system, a single 14-cell cooling tower, 20 wells (including production and injection wells) and 12 well pads, and a 2.5-mile-long aboveground interconnection to an Imperial Irrigation District switching station to be constructed as part of the project.

California Energy Commission's Site Certification Process

The CEC is responsible for reviewing and ultimately approving or denying all AFCs to construct and operate thermal power plants, 50 MW and greater, in California. The CEC's facility certification process carefully examines public health and safety, environmental impacts, and engineering aspects of proposed power plants and all related facilities such as electric transmission lines and water pipelines. The CEC's power plant site certification process is a certified regulatory program as defined in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines and the CEC is the lead agency under CEQA.

Summary of California Energy Commission Staff's Preliminary Conclusions

In the PSA, CEC staff concludes that with implementation of the recommended conditions of certification, MBGP would comply with all applicable LORS, except for one goal in the Imperial County General Plan for which a conclusion is pending¹. Staff also concludes that potentially significant environmental impacts would be reduced to less than significant with implementation of Conditions of Certification/Mitigation Measures (COCs/MMs), except for Cultural/Tribal Cultural Resources, which would be significant

¹ The project is in military airspace areas. Until staff receives project review comments from the Department of Defense, the project's conformance with Goal 6 of the Imperial County General Plan, "Support development of renewable energy while providing for the protection of military aviation and operations", is undetermined.

and unavoidable for features including mud pots and mud volcanoes, and for viewshed impacts to the identified cultural district.

Availability of the Preliminary Staff Assessment

Access to the PSA and other project information/reports will be available electronically through the CEC's project docket website at:

<https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=23-AFC-01>

Persons who cannot access the materials through the link above are encouraged to email Eric Veerkamp, Project Manager, at: Eric.Veerkamp@energy.ca.gov, with a subject line "Morton Bay Geothermal Project" or call (916) 661-8458 to arrange for alternative means of access to project materials.

Public Resources, Contact Information and Additional Sources for Information

Contact: For questions about this notice, please contact Eric Veerkamp, Project Manager, at (916) 661-8458 or via e-mail at Eric.Veerkamp@energy.ca.gov.

Agency and Public Participation: The CEC encourages agency and public participation in the review of MBGP's AFC. The agency and public comment period for this PSA is from **June 27, 2024** to **August 12, 2024**. The preferable method to submit responses is via the CEC's electronic commenting or filing (e-Comment; e-Filing) system. To access this system, go to the CEC's webpage for this proceeding: <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/steam-turbine/morton-bay-geothermal-project-mbgbp>, click on the "Submit e-Comment" or "Submit e-Filing" link, and follow the instructions in the online form. Please be sure to include the project name in your comments. Once filed, the comments and/or document(s) will become part of the proceeding's public record.

If you wish to mail written comments on the project, please submit them to the CEC Docket Unit. Please include the docket number (23-AFC-01) for the MBGP project in the subject line or first paragraph of your comments and mail them to:

California Energy Commission
Docket Unit
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

All written comments and materials filed with the Docket Unit will become a part of the public record of the proceeding. Additionally, comments will be posted on the MBGP webpage of the CEC's website.

The CEC's Office of the Public Advisor, Energy Equity, and Tribal Affairs is available to provide information on, and assistance with, public participation in CEC proceedings. The Public Advisor's Office can be reached by phone at (916) 957-7910 and by email at publicadvisor@energy.ca.gov.

Media questions should be directed to the CEC's Media Office by phone at (916) 654-4989 or by email at mediaoffice@energy.ca.gov.