

DOCKETED	
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Project Title:	Soda Mountain Solar
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Document Title:	Section 3-14 Population and Housing
Description:	This Section evaluates the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts the Project may have related to population and housing and identifies any required Applicant-Proposed Measures (APM) and any required Mitigation Measures.
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3.14 POPULATION AND HOUSING

This section includes analysis of the impacts to population and housing that may result directly or indirectly from implementation of the proposed project. The analysis in this section describes the applicable regulations, presents an overview of existing conditions that influence population and housing, identifies the criteria used for determining the significance of environmental impacts, and describes the potential impacts to population and housing from the project. The analysis is based on a review of existing resources, technical data, and applicable laws, regulations, plans, and policies.

3.14.1 Regulatory Setting

3.14.1.1 Federal

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REQUIREMENTS

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Land Use Planning Handbook, H-1601-1, Appendix D, Section IV (Environmental Justice Requirements) provides guidance for assessing potential impacts to population, housing, and employment as they relate to environmental justice (BLM 2021).

3.14.1.2 State

CALIFORNIA REVENUE AND TAXATION CODE SECTION 73

Assembly Bill 15, signed by the California Governor in June 2011, modified and extended existing state law excluding an “active solar energy system” from calculation of cash value subject to property taxation. An active solar energy system includes photovoltaic (PV) panels, inverters, and other improvements necessary to deliver electric power for transmission or final use. The exclusion applies to new systems constructed prior to January 1, 2017, and remains in effect until a change in ownership occurs.

3.14.1.3 Local

There are no local regulations, plans, or policies related to population and housing that are relevant to the project.

3.14.2 Environmental Setting

The project site is located in northeastern San Bernardino County, approximately 7 miles southwest of the community of Baker. The site and its immediately adjoining areas are vacant, with no existing population or housing.

3.14.2.1 Socioeconomics

Construction of the project is anticipated to occur over an approximately 18-month period. An average of 200 construction workers would operate daily on-site, with an anticipated 300 construction workers during peak construction activities.

Operation of the proposed project is expected to require a workforce of approximately 25 to 40 personnel to visit the substation on an as-needed basis for maintenance, equipment operation, and/or security.

Both temporary and long-term workforce would be expected to commute to the project site from nearby populated areas. It is anticipated that most workers would commute to the site from Barstow, which is approximately 50 miles southwest of the project site, and the closest city. Some workers may commute from more distant areas such as Victorville, Hesperia, and San Bernardino. Workers may also reside in the unincorporated community of Baker, which is approximately 7 miles northeast of the project site.

3.14.2.2 Population

The project site is in San Bernardino County, which is the fifth most populous county in California (State of California Department of Finance [DOF] 2024). Table 3.14-1 provides a summary of the existing population, housing, and employment conditions for San Bernardino County, and the city of Barstow, which is the nearest city to the project site and where the construction workforce would largely be recruited. The city of Barstow is located approximately 50 miles southwest of the project site and the only major community located within an hour’s drive of the project site. Workers may also commute from the unincorporated community of Baker, as it is the closest community to the project site, and the cities of Hesperia, San Bernardino, Victorville, which are all included in the analysis.

Population estimates, future projections, and average annual growth rates for San Bernardino County are summarized in Table 3.14-2. As shown in Table 3.14-2, population growth in San Bernardino County is expected to increase slowly from 2025 through 2060.

Table 3.14-1. Existing Population, Housing, and Employment Conditions

Location	Population (2023)	Housing Units		Employment	
		Total Units	Vacancy Rate	Total Employed	Unemployment Rate
San Bernardino County	2,182,056	747,011	8.8%	969,200	5.0%
City of Barstow	24,918	9,623	8.8%	9,800	5.6%
City of Hesperia	100,041	31,020	4.0%	35,900	6.7%
City of San Bernardino	223,230	67,593	4.0%	83,800	6.2%
City of Victorville	137,193	40,473	4.9%	46,000	7.5%
Unincorporated Community of Baker*	751	310	28.7%	428	4.3%

Sources: DOF (2024); San Bernardino County (2019); State of California Employment Development Department (2024).

*The most recent available data for the unincorporated community of Baker was from 2019.

Table 3.14-2. Projected Population Estimates

Projected Population, 2025	2,310,552
Projected Population, 2030	2,395,632
Project Average Annual Growth Rate, 2025–2030	0.74%
Projected Population, 2035	2,469,881
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2030–2035	0.62%
Projected Population, 2040	2,529,068
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2035–2040	0.48%
Projected Population, 2045	2,574,712
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2040–2045	0.36%

Projected Population, 2050	2,611,732
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2045–2050	0.29%
Projected Population, 2055	2,646,367
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2050–2055	0.27%
Projected Population, 2060	2,684,218
Projected Average Annual Growth Rate, 2055–2060	0.29%

Source: DOF 2024.

3.14.2.3 Housing

The current occupied and vacant housing estimates are presented in Table 3.14-1 for San Bernardino County and the city of Barstow, which is the nearest city to the project site. Both San Bernardino County and the Barstow have a relatively low vacancy rate, each at 8.8%. The other cities included in the analysis, Hesperia, San Bernardino, and Victorville, have lower vacancy rates at 4%, 4%, and 4.9% respectively. The unincorporated community of Baker has a significantly higher vacancy rate at 28.7%.

3.14.2.4 Economic Conditions

EMPLOYMENT AND LABOR FORCE

As shown in Table 3.14-1, San Bernardino County has an unemployment rate of 5.0% and the city of Barstow has a similar unemployment rate of 5.5%. The cities further from the project site, Hesperia, San Bernardino, and Victorville, have higher unemployment rates at 6.7%, 6.2%, and 7.5%, respectively. The unincorporated community of Baker has the lowest unemployment rate at 4.3%.

3.14.3 Impact Analysis

3.14.3.1 Thresholds of Significance

The determinations of significance of project impacts are based on applicable policies, regulations, goals, and guidelines defined by CEQA. Specifically, the project would be considered to have a significant effect on population and housing if the effects exceed the significance criteria described below:

1. Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure).
2. Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere.

Each of these thresholds is discussed under Section 3.14.3.2, Impact Assessment.

3.14.3.2 Impact Assessment

Impact PH-1: *Would the project induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and businesses) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)? (Less than Significant)*

CONSTRUCTION

Construction of the project is anticipated to occur over an approximately 18-month period. An average of 200 construction workers would operate daily on-site, with an anticipated 300 construction workers during peak construction activities. On-site construction jobs will include electricians, ironworkers, laborers, etc. While construction of the project would create temporary construction-related jobs, the work requirements of most construction projects are highly specialized such that construction workers remain at a job site only for the time during which their specific skills are needed to complete a particular phase of the construction process. The project would draw from the existing regional pool of construction workers who typically move from project to project as work is available. Project-related construction workers would not be expected to relocate their household's permanent place of residence as a consequence of working on the project.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

A workforce of approximately 25 to 40 personnel would visit the substation on an as needed basis for maintenance, equipment operation, and/or security. Operation of the proposed project is expected to require a workforce of approximately 25 to 40 personnel, to visit the substation on an as needed basis for maintenance, equipment operation, and/or security.

Both temporary and long-term workforce would be expected to commute to the project site from nearby populated areas. It is anticipated that most workers would commute to the site from Barstow, which is approximately 50 miles southwest of the project site, and the closest city. Workers may also reside in the unincorporated community of Baker, which is approximately 7 miles northeast of the project site. Some workers may commute from more distant areas such as Victorville, Hesperia, and San Bernardino.

As shown in Table 3.14-1, San Bernardino County has an unemployment rate of 5.0%, and the city of Barstow has a similar unemployment rate of 5.5%. The cities further from the project site, Hesperia, San Bernardino, and Victorville, have higher unemployment rates at 6.7%, 6.2%, and 7.5%, respectively. The unincorporated community of Baker has the lowest unemployment rate at 4.3%. As mentioned above, and based on the unemployment rates and population size, it is anticipated that most of the construction, operation, and maintenance workforce would come from the existing labor pool in one of the nearby communities included in the analysis.

Both San Bernardino County and the city of Barstow have relatively low vacancy rates, each at 8.8%. The other cities included in the analysis, Hesperia, San Bernardino, and Victorville, have lower vacancy rates at 4.0%, 4.0%, and 4.9%, respectively. The unincorporated community of Baker has a significantly higher vacancy rate at 28.7%. According to this data, there are sufficient vacant housing units within the local communities to support the number of construction, operation, and maintenance workers to the extent that the project's workforce would not be considered a substantial sudden growth that poses a burden on surrounding communities. The project would not cause a shortage in available housing for existing residents of San Bernardino County, and would not trigger the need for new housing, and would not induce a substantial permanent growth to the regional population levels.

Although the project would contribute to energy supply, which is one factor of population growth, the project would not significantly increase employment, population, or growth within the region. The project does not include any residential development, such as residential subdivisions, mobile home parks, or construction of single-family residences, that would cause an increase in population. The project also does not include a recreational component, such as a hotel, resort, campground, or other facility that would attract or accommodate an increase in visitors to the area that would indirectly cause temporary increases in population. Overall, no new permanent residents are expected during construction and operation of the project. Therefore, the project would not induce population growth and impacts would be **less than significant**.

Impact PH-2: Would the project displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere? (Less than Significant)

The project would be constructed on undeveloped land administered by the BLM. The site does not contain any residential structures, and no people live on the site under existing conditions. The project does not include the addition of a residential component and, as such, no changes to existing conditions related to housing would occur. Construction, operation and maintenance, and decommissioning of the solar facilities would occur within the project site boundaries and would not result in the displacement of any existing housing or people and would not necessitate the construction of replacement housing elsewhere; impacts would be **less than significant**.

3.14.4 Cumulative Impacts

Impact C-PH-1: Would the impacts of the proposed project, in combination with other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects, contribute to a cumulative impact related to population and housing? (Less than Significant)

As the project would not result in impacts related to population and housing, it would not contribute to cumulative impacts related to population growth or the displacement of substantial numbers of existing housing or people. Therefore, impacts to population and housing **would not be cumulatively considerable**.

3.14.5 References Cited

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 2005. H-1601-1. Land Use Planning Handbook (March 2021).

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