

DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	24-OPT-03
Project Title:	Soda Mountain Solar
TN #:	257913
Document Title:	Chapter 1 Executive Summary
Description:	This Chapter summarizes the Project objectives, location, elements, schedule, ownership and history.
Filer:	Hannah Gbeh
Organization:	Resolution Environmental
Submitter Role:	Applicant Consultant
Submission Date:	7/22/2024 5:19:38 PM
Docketed Date:	7/23/2024

CHAPTER 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 PROJECT OVERVIEW

Soda Mountain Solar, LLC (applicant), proposes to construct, operate, and maintain a utility-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) electrical generating and storage facility and associated infrastructure to generate and deliver renewable electricity to the statewide electricity transmission grid. The project would generate up to 300 megawatts (MW) of renewable energy and include up to 300 MW of battery storage. The project also includes future decommissioning, which is anticipated to occur after 30 years of operation.

The project is located on approximately 2,670 acres of land administered by the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Desert District, within the jurisdiction of the Barstow Field Office in San Bernardino County (County).

1.2 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project's primary goal is to contribute to the achievement of California's renewable energy goals and create a vital new point of interconnection for renewable energy in San Bernardino County to connect to California's electric transmission infrastructure. The project objectives are identified as follows:

- Assist the State of California in achieving or exceeding its Renewables Portfolio Standard and greenhouse gas emissions reduction objectives by developing and constructing new California Renewables Portfolio Standard-qualified solar power generation facilities producing approximately 300 MW.
- Produce and transmit electricity at a competitive cost.
- Provide a new source of energy storage that assists the state in achieving its energy storage mandates.
- Use the existing transmission unused capacity that provides approximately 300 MW of capacity.
- Utilize existing energy infrastructure to the extent possible by locating solar power generation facilities near existing infrastructure, such as electrical transmission facilities.
- Site solar power generation facilities in areas of San Bernardino County that have the best solar resource to maximize energy production and the efficient use of land.
- Develop a solar power generation facility in San Bernardino County that would support the economy by investing in the local community, creating local construction jobs, and increasing tax and fee revenue to the County.

1.3 PROJECT LOCATION

The project is located entirely on federally owned land managed by the BLM. The 2,670-acre project site is located approximately 7 miles southwest of the community of Baker in unincorporated San Bernardino County, California, approximately 50 miles northeast of Barstow. The project site is located in portions of Sections 1 and 11-14, Township 12 North, Range 7 East; Sections 25 and 36, Township 13 North, Range 7 East; Sections 6, 7, 8, and 18, Township 13 North, Range 8 East, San Bernardino Meridian, California.

1.4 PROJECT ELEMENTS

The project proposes to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission a 300-MW PV solar facility located on approximately 2,670 acres. The project components are as follows:

1. The solar plant site (i.e., all facilities that create a footprint in and around the field of solar panels, including the solar field consisting of solar power arrays identified as the East Array and South Arrays 1, 2, and 3), operation and maintenance buildings and structures, stormwater infrastructure, and related infrastructure and improvements.
2. A substation and switchyard for interconnection to the existing transmission system.
3. Approximately 300 MW of battery energy storage system (BESS) across 18 acres.

The project would operate year-round and would generate electricity during daylight hours when the sun is shining. The project would generate and deliver solar-generated power to the regional electrical grid through an interconnection with the existing Marketplace-Adelanto 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line operated by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP).

1.5 PROJECT SCHEDULE

Construction of the project is anticipated to begin in 2025, occur over an approximately 18-month period, consist of overlapping construction stages. The project would begin operation in 2027 and operate 7 days a week, 365 days a year, with an approximately 30-year anticipated lifespan.

1.6 PROJECT OWNERSHIP

The project site is located entirely on lands owned by the BLM. The BLM lease owner of the project is a Limited Liability Company named Soda Mountain Solar LLC. The operator of the project is VC Renewables. The power produced by the project would be conveyed to the regional electrical grid through an interconnection with the existing transmission line operated by LADWP.

1.7 BACKGROUND AND PROJECT HISTORY

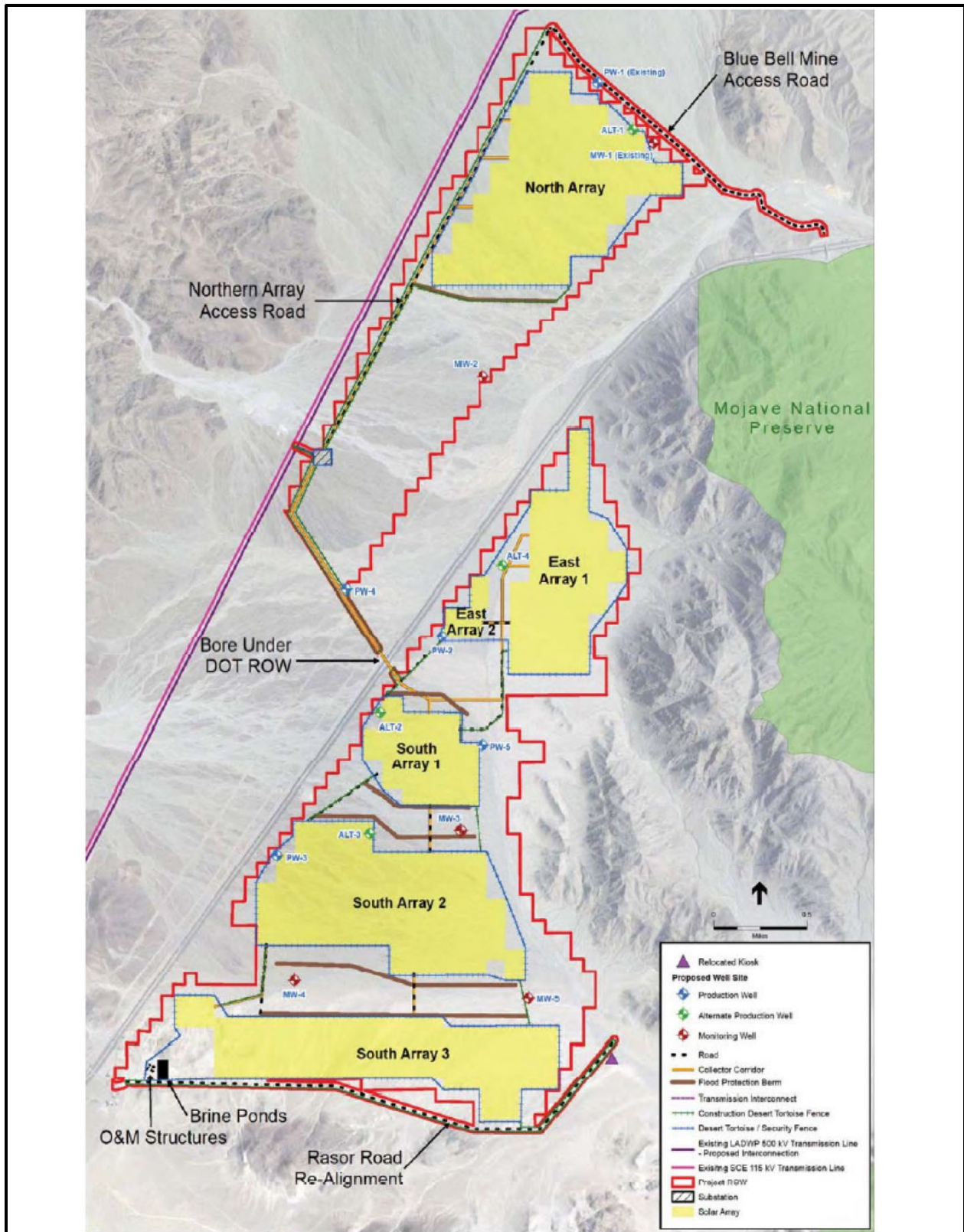
On December 14, 2007, the project applicant, Soda Mountain Solar, LLC, filed a right-of-way (ROW) grant application with the BLM to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission the project (Case File Number CACA-049584). A ROW grant requires compliance with applicable state environmental laws, including the need to obtain an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) and Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement (LSAA) from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), waste discharge requirements (WDRs) from the Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB), and associated approvals of any required mitigation measures. This original project application covered 4,179 acres of BLM-administered land and included a 358-MW solar facility on a proposed development footprint of approximately 2,222 acres (Figure 1-1). All of the land within the project application area was within the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, a Congress-designated, 25-million-acre expanse of resource-rich desert lands in southern California through the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The proposed project required an amendment to the CDCA Plan to allow use of the project site for solar development. The ROW grant application and proposed project's need for a CDCA Plan Amendment (PA) triggered the need for environmental analysis of potential impacts under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

As part of the original project proposal, Soda Mountain Solar, LLC, applied for groundwater well permits with the County of San Bernardino on August 2, 2012. The groundwater well permit applications triggered the need for environmental analysis under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The BLM and the County jointly prepared a proposed PA to the CDCA Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under NEPA and CEQA.

The BLM and the County published the final CDCA PA and EIS/EIR document on June 12, 2015. The BLM issued a Record of Decision (ROD) to approve a revised configuration of the application and associated amendment to the CDCA Plan in March 2016 (BLM 2016). Compared with the original project analyzed in the PA and EIS/EIR, the revised project configuration in the ROD removed 571 acres from the proposed development (the North Solar Array), reduced impacts to visual resources, and included future efforts to restore connectivity for desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni*) (Figure 1-2).

Soda Mountain Solar, LLC, also filed revised groundwater well permit applications with the County on May 12, 2016. The County held a hearing on adoption of the EIR and approval of the groundwater permits on August 23, 2016. Despite the project receiving a ROD from the BLM and recommendation from the County Planning Staff to approve the project, the County Board of Supervisors declined to certify the EIR. As the County did not certify the EIR, no decision was made regarding the groundwater permits. The revised project configuration approved in the BLM ROD is the same as the proposed project being analyzed under this EIR, with the additional removal of any groundwater wells.



Source: County of San Bernardino, 2015

Figure 1-1. Project proposed in 2015.

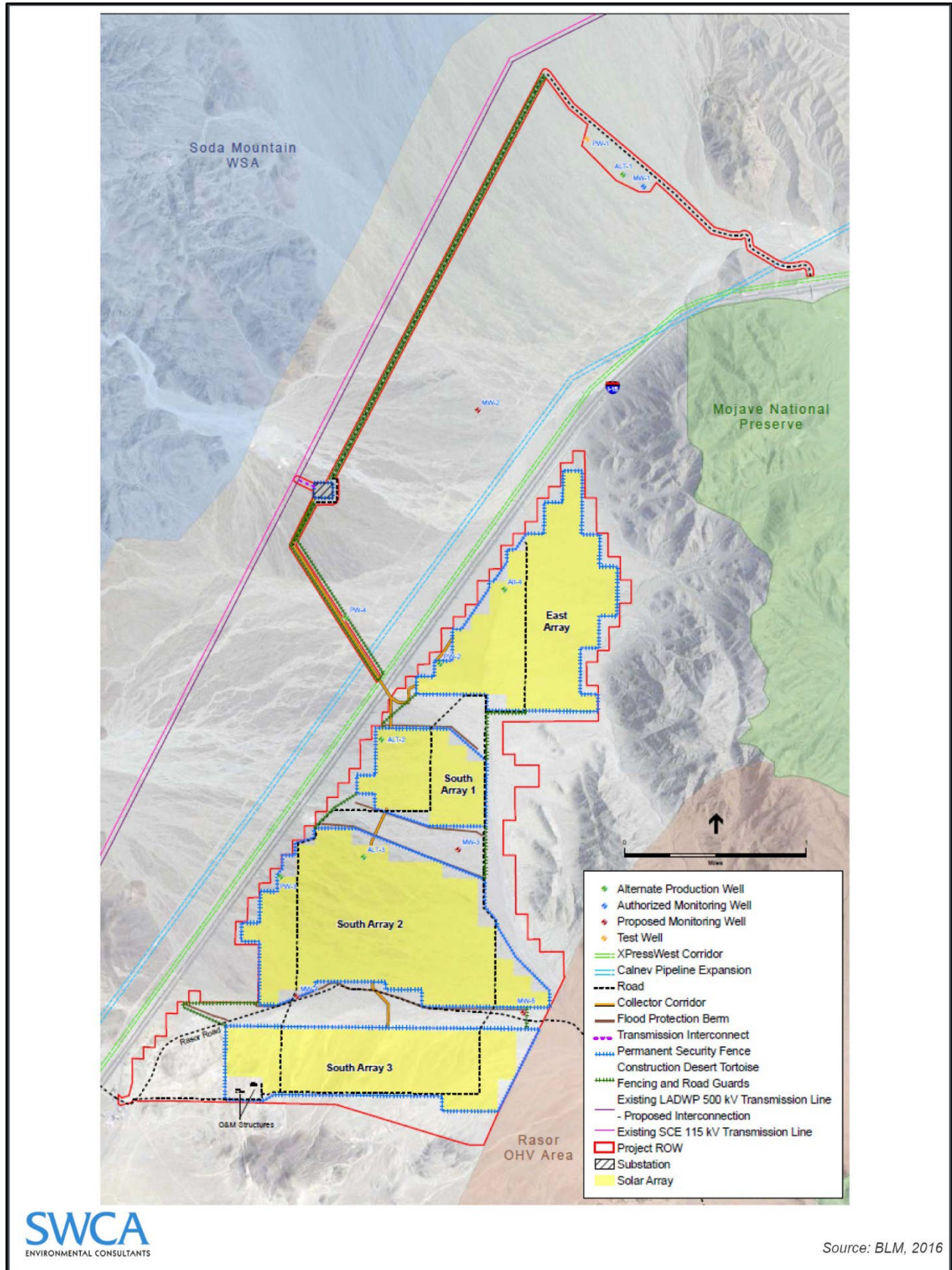


Figure 1-2. Project approved by BLM in 2016.

1.7.1 References Cited

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 2016. *Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, Land Use Plan Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan, Bishop Resource Management Plan, and Bakersfield Resource Management Plan*. Available at: https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/lup/66459/133474/163144/DRECP_BLM_LUPA.pdf. Accessed January 2024.