

## CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

1516 NINTH STREET  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814-5512  
www.energy.ca.gov

California Energy Commission

**DOCKETED  
11-AFC-04**

TN # 67887

OCT 22 2012



October 18, 2012

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF A  
PRELIMINARY STAFF ASSESSMENT – PART B  
FOR THE PROPOSED RIO MESA SOLAR ELECTRIC GENERATING FACILITY  
APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION (11-AFC-04)**

**TO: MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

This notice is to inform you that the California Energy Commission (Energy Commission) staff has prepared a Preliminary Staff Assessment – Part B (PSA Part B) for the Rio Mesa Solar Electric Generating Facility (Rio Mesa SEGF) Application for Certification (AFC). The PSA Part B was published on October 15, 2012.

The PSA contains the California Energy Commission staff's independent, objective evaluation of the proposed Rio Mesa SEGF AFC. The PSA was filed in two parts. PSA Part A was published September 28, 2012. PSA Part B was published on October 15, 2012. The PSA examines engineering, environmental, public health, and safety aspects of the proposed Rio Mesa SEGF project, based on the information provided by the applicant, government agencies, interested parties, intervenors, and other sources available at the time the PSA was prepared. This PSA Part B includes staff's environmental and engineering evaluation of the Rio Mesa SEGF project in the following technical areas: **Alternatives, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Land Use**. PSA Part A contained staff's environmental and engineering evaluation of the proposed project for the balance of the remaining technical sections: **Air Quality, Hazardous Materials Management, Noise and Vibration, Public Health, Socioeconomics, Water Supply, Soil and Surface Water, Traffic and Transportation, Transmission Line Safety and Nuisance, Visual Resources, Waste Management, Worker Safety and Fire Protection, Facility Design, Geology and Paleontology, Efficiency, Reliability, and Transmission System Engineering**.

**SUMMARY OF CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION STAFF'S PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS**

Based upon the information provided, discovery achieved and analyses completed to date, staff concluded that the project would not be consistent with several laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS) and would result in significant, unmitigable adverse environmental impacts in Visual Resources (discussed in PSA Part A) and **Biological and Cultural Resources** (discussed in PSA Part B). Staff also identified additional informational needs in **Geology and Paleontology, Soil and Surface Water, Water Supply, Traffic and Transportation, Transmission System Engineering, and Visual Resources** (discussed in PSA Part A) as well as in **Biological Resources, Land Use, and Cultural Resources** (discussed in PSA Part B).

The California Energy Commission encourages public participation in the review of the Rio Mesa SEGF Application for Certification (11-AFC-04). The public comment period for this PSA is from September 28, 2012 to November 14, 2012 (30-days from the October 15, 2012 publication date of PSA Part B). If you would like to provide written comments on the project, please submit them to the Energy Commission Dockets Unit. Please include the docket number 11-AFC-04 for the Rio Mesa SEGF project in the subject line or first paragraph of your comments. If you would like to submit comments electronically, please provide them in either Microsoft Word format or as a Portable Document Format (PDF) to [docket@energy.ca.gov](mailto:docket@energy.ca.gov). Please include your name or organization's name in the file name.

If you are preparing non-electronic written comments, please mail or hand deliver them to:

California Energy Commission  
Dockets Unit, MS-4  
Docket No. 11-AFC-04  
1516 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

All written comments and materials filed with the Dockets Unit will become a part of the public record of the proceeding. Additionally, comments may be posted on the project website. Written comments on the PSA should be provided no later than 5:00 p.m., November 14, 2012. Technical or project schedule questions should be directed to Energy Commission Project Manager Pierre Martinez at (916) 651-3765, or by email at [pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov](mailto:pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov), or the address on the letterhead.

Following the comment period on the PSA, one or more staff-led public workshops, and receipt of outstanding information, the staff will prepare a Final Staff Assessment (FSA) which will serve as staff's formal testimony in evidentiary hearings to be held by the Energy Commission's Committee assigned to hear this case. The Committee will hold evidentiary hearings to consider the recommendations presented by staff, applicant, intervenors, government agencies, and the public prior to proposing its decision. In the last step, the full Energy Commission will issue the final decision.

## **SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED RIO MESA ELECTRIC GENERATING FACILITY**

The Rio Mesa SEGF is proposed for development by Rio Mesa I, LLC and Rio Mesa II, LLC. Each entity would hold an equal one half ownership interest of certain shared facilities while separately owning each respective power plant. Both entities are wholly owned subsidiaries of Rio Mesa Holdings, LLC, which in turn is a wholly owned subsidiary of BrightSource Energy, Inc. The site is located in eastern Riverside County, approximately 13 miles southwest of Blythe, California. The project site is generally bounded on the east by the 161 kV Western Area Power Authority (WAPA) transmission lines, with undeveloped desert lands and active agriculture further east, on the south by undeveloped desert lands located in Imperial County, on the west by undeveloped desert lands and the Mule Mountains, and on the north by undeveloped public desert lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

As proposed, the Rio Mesa SEGF would encompass a total of approximately 3,805 acres on land leased from the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD). This area would include two proposed power plants, associated heliostat fields, and support facilities located within a common area. Additional land area, required to accommodate the project gen-tie transmission lines, emergency and construction electrical power supply line, and primary access road, would be located primarily on public lands administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), although some properties within the gen-tie transmission corridor are private lands.

The Rio Mesa SEGF would comprise two solar concentration thermal power plants, associated solar fields, and an approximate 19.5-acre common area to accommodate a combined administrative, control, maintenance, and warehouse building; evaporation ponds; groundwater wells; a water treatment plant; and a common switchyard. An approximate 103-acre construction logistics area (CLA) would be established to accommodate construction parking, office equipment, and conference trailers; equipment staging assembly and material storage; a tire cleaning station; and other construction support facilities.

Each solar plant would generate 250 megawatts (MW) (net), for a total net output of 500 MW and would use heliostats – elevated mirrors guided by a tracking system mounted on a pylon – to focus the sun’s rays on a receiver located atop a 750-foot-tall solar power tower near the center of each solar field. Each solar field would use approximately 85,000 heliostats. Rio Mesa I, the southernmost plant site, would occupy approximately 1,828 acres, and Rio Mesa II, the northernmost plant site, would occupy approximately 1,977 acres.

Each power plant would use a solar power boiler, located atop a dedicated concrete tower, and a solar field based on heliostat mirror technology developed by BrightSource Energy, Inc. The heliostat fields would focus solar energy on the solar power boiler, referred to as “solar receiver steam generator” (SRSG), which converts the solar energy into superheated steam.

Each power plant would generate electricity using solar energy as its primary fuel source. However, auxiliary boilers would be used to operate in parallel with the solar fields during partial load conditions and occasionally in the afternoon when power is needed after the solar energy has diminished to a level that no longer would support solar-only generation of electricity. These auxiliary boilers would also assist with daily start-up of the power generation equipment and night time preservation.

The Rio Mesa SEGF is proposed to be interconnected to the Southern California Edison (SCE) grid through a new 220kV line that would be built as part of the project and would run north approximately 9.7 miles to connect to the Colorado River Substation.

Access to both plants would be via Bradshaw Trail (primary) – paved or unpaved – and a new secondary access road directly north and parallel to 34<sup>th</sup> Avenue off of State Route 78. The portion of Bradshaw Trail that would be used for the primary access route is currently a two-lane, east-west paved road for one mile west of Rannells Avenue. Beyond the paved

segment it becomes a graded dirt road. The applicant proposes to improve the segment to a point where it connects to the northerly boundary of the northern plant, however, that portion of Bradshaw Trail traverses BLM land and how it is improved is at the discretion of BLM. The secondary access route would be improved and provide access to the southerly power plant north of the proposed metering station. In addition to the access roads, each plant would have perimeter unimproved access/maintenance roads.

**ENERGY COMMISSION LICENSING AUTHORITY**

The Energy Commission is responsible for reviewing and ultimately approving or denying all applications for construction and operation of thermal electric power plants, 50 MW and greater, proposed for construction in California. The Energy Commission'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 natural gas and water pipelines. The Energy Commission also evaluates the project to determine if it would be consistent with all applicable LORS. The Energy Commission is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and, as a certified regulatory agency pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080.5, produces several environmental and decision documents rather than an Environmental Impact Report.

**PUBLIC RESOURCES CONTACT INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

If you would like information on how to participate in the Energy Commission's review of the proposed project, please contact Jennifer Jennings, the Energy Commission's Public Adviser, at (916) 653-5898 or toll free in California at (800) 822-6228, or by email at: [publicadviser@energy.ca.gov](mailto:publicadviser@energy.ca.gov).

The status of the project, copies of notices, PSA Part A and Part B, and other relevant documents are also available on the Energy Commission's web site: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/riomesa/index.html>.

News media inquiries should be directed to Assistant Executive Director, Adam Gottlieb, at (916) 654-4989, or by email at: [mediaoffice@energy.ca.gov](mailto:mediaoffice@energy.ca.gov).

Paper copies of the PSA will be available for review at the following local libraries:

<b>Palo Verde Valley District Library</b> 125 West Chanslor Way Blythe, CA 9225-1245	<b>Riverside Main Library</b> 3581 Mission Inn Avenue Riverside, CA 92501
<b>Lake Tamarisk Library</b> 43880 Lake Tamarisk Drive Desert Center, CA 92239	<b>Coachella Branch Library</b> 1538 Seventh Street Coachella, CA 92236
<b>Imperial County Free Library</b> 1125 Main Street El Centro, CA 92243	

Copies of the PSA are also available at the Energy Commission's Library in Sacramento, the California State Library in Sacramento, and at California public libraries in Eureka, Fresno, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. In addition, copies will be distributed to those public agencies that would normally have jurisdiction except for the Energy Commission's exclusive authority to certify sites and related facilities.

If you would like a paper copy or CD of the PSA, please fill out the enclosed form and return it to the California Energy Commission, attention: Pierre Martinez, Project Manager, or by e-mail at [pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov](mailto:pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
ROGER E. JOHNSON, Deputy Director  
Siting, Transmission and Environmental  
Protection Division

Enclosure

cc: Property Owner List No. 7412 (Notice)  
General List No. 7411

Please send me a paper copy / CD (please circle one) of the California Energy Commission staff's Preliminary Staff Assessment Part B for the RIO MESA SOLAR ELECTRIC GENERATING FACILITY (RIO MESA SEGF) Application for Certification (11-AFC-04).

Name:

Address:

City/State/Zip:

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California Energy Commission  
**Attention:** Pierre Martinez  
1516 Ninth Street, MS-15  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

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**Staple or Tape closed**

**CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION**

1516 NINTH STREET  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814-5512  
www.energy.ca.gov



October 18, 2012

Dear Librarian:

**DOCUMENT HANDLING FOR THE PRELIMINARY STAFF ASSESSMENT – PART B FOR THE PROPOSED RIO MESA SOLAR GENERATING FACILITY (11-AFC-04) and POSTING OF PUBLIC NOTICE**

The enclosed Preliminary Staff Assessment – Part B (PSA) contains the California Energy Commission staff's preliminary engineering and environmental evaluation of the Rio Mesa Solar Electric Generating Facility (Rio Mesa SEGF) proposed to be located in the county of Riverside. Please make this PSA available for those who may wish to be informed about the project. We request that you not allow the PSA or any of its contents to be removed from the library. To increase accessibility of the document, we ask, if possible, that you cross reference it as a general reference work under the title and author categories, as well as under such subjects as "Energy Commission," "electricity energy/generation," "power plant siting," or any other relevant subject.

The Energy Commission's siting process is open to the public and incorporates the input of the public as well as local, state and federal agencies. To facilitate public participation in our review process, the Commission distributes copies of staff documents such as the PSA to public libraries in communities near the proposed project, and in major cities throughout the state. As such, please retain a copy of the enclosed Notice of Availability behind the front cover of the PSA and also post a copy of the Notice of Availability in a place conspicuous and accessible to those members of the general public who visit the library.

Thank you for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact Pierre Martinez, Siting Project Manager, at (916) 651-3765 or by e-mail at: [pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov](mailto:pierre.martinez@energy.ca.gov).

Sincerely,

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Chris Davis, Office Manager  
Siting Office

cc: Library List No. 7414 (Notice, hardcopy and/or CD)

## CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

1516 NINTH STREET  
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814-5512  
www.energy.ca.gov



October 18, 2012

**REQUEST FOR COMMENTS  
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FACILITY (11-AFC-04)**

To: AGENCY DISTRIBUTION LIST

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**AVAILABILITY OF THE PRELIMINARY STAFF ASSESSMENT**

The status of the project, an electronic copy of the PSA, Parts A and B, copies of notices and other relevant documents are available on the Energy Commission's web site: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/riomesa/index.html>. You can also subscribe to receive e-mail notification of all notices and announcements by completing the List Server information in the right margin of the website noted above.

Sincerely,

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chris Davis, Office Manager  
Siting Office

cc: Agency List No.7413 (Notice and CD)