

CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

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California Energy Commission

**DOCKETED
11-AFC-2**

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December 21, 2012

**NOTICE OF AVAILABILITY OF FINAL STAFF ASSESSMENT
FOR THE PROPOSED HIDDEN HILLS SOLAR ELECTRIC PROJECT
(11-AFC-2)****To: MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

This notice is to inform you of the availability of the Final Staff Assessment (FSA) for the Hidden Hills Solar Electric Generating System (HHSEGS) Application for Certification (11-AFC-2). The FSA contains the California Energy Commission staff's final engineering, environmental and public health and safety evaluation of the proposed HHSEGS. The FSA 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.

The California Energy Commission encourages public participation in the review of the HHSEGS's Application for Certification (AFC). Technical or project schedule questions should be directed to the Energy Commission's project manager, Mr. Mike Monasmith, at (916) 654-4894 or by email at mike.monasmith@energy.ca.gov.

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED HIDDEN HILLS SOLAR ELECTRIC GENERATING SYSTEM

The Hidden Hills Solar Electric Generating System (HHSEGS) is proposed for development by a wholly owned subsidiary of BrightSource Energy, Inc. (Applicant). As proposed, HHSEGS would be located on approximately 3,097 acres of privately owned land leased in Inyo County, California, adjacent to the Nevada border. The project site is approximately 8 miles directly south of Pahrump, Nevada, and approximately 45 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Nevada.

As proposed, HHSEGS would comprise two solar fields and associated facilities: the northern solar plant (Solar Plant 1) and the southern solar plant (Solar Plant 2). Each solar plant would generate 270 megawatts (MW) gross (250 MW net), for a total net output of 500 MW. Solar Plant 1 would occupy approximately 1,483 acres (or 2.3 square miles), and Solar Plant 2 would occupy approximately 1,510 acres (or 2.4 square miles). A 103-acre common area would be established on the southeastern corner of the site to accommodate an administration, warehouse, and maintenance complex, an onsite 138 kV switchyard and a natural gas metering station. A temporary construction lay down and parking area on the west side of the proposed project site

would temporarily occupy approximately 180 acres. The temporary construction laydown area in addition to the entire HHSEGS site would total 3,277 acres.

Groundwater would be drawn daily from six onsite groundwater supply wells that would be drilled and developed to provide raw water for the HHSEGS project; two new wells per power block (primary and backup) and two wells at the administration complex. The wells would supply both solar plants and would be used for the power cycle make-up water, mirror wash water, and other domestic uses. Once operational, the entire 500-MW net project would require up to 140 acre feet of groundwater per year (an acre foot of water equals 325,851 gallons).

HHSEGS will interconnect to the Valley Electric Association (VEA) system. The interconnection would require an approximately 10-mile-long generation tie-line (gen-tie line) from the HHSEGS to the proposed Crazy Eyes Tap Station, where the project would interconnect to the VEA electric grid. The gen-tie line would originate at the HHSEGS onsite switchyard, cross the Nevada state line, and continue east for approximately 1.5 miles until reaching Tecopa Road. At Tecopa Road, the route would head northeast paralleling Tecopa Road until it reaches the Crazy Eyes Tap Substation, which would be located immediately east of the Tecopa Road/SR 160 intersection. A 12-inch-diameter natural gas pipeline would also be required for the project. The gas pipeline would enter the HHSEGS site in the common area where it would connect with an onsite gas metering station. It would exit the HHSEGS site at the California-Nevada border, and follow the same route as the transmission line along Tecopa Road to SR 160, extending 32.4 miles to the Kern River Gas Transmission (KRG T) existing mainline system just north of Goodsprings in Clark County, Nevada.

ENERGY COMMISSION'S SITE CERTIFICATION PROCESS

The Energy Commission is responsible for reviewing and ultimately approving or denying all applications to construct and operate thermal electric power plants, 50 MW and greater, 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 has a certified regulatory program and is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

SUMMARY OF CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION STAFF'S FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The FSA concludes that the HHSEGS project does not comply with all applicable laws, ordinances, regulations and standards (LORS). Specifically, there is non-compliance, or potential non-compliance, for **Land Use** (County of Inyo General Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Renewable Energy Ordinance [Title 21]), and **Visual Resources** (several applicable goals and policies of the Inyo County General Plan and Renewable Energy Ordinance, Title 21).

With the implementation of its recommended mitigation measures (described in each technical section's conditions of certification), potential environmental impacts of the project will be mitigated to levels of less than significant, except in four technical areas: **Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Land Use** and **Visual Resources**.

Furthermore, in the areas of Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Visual Resources, staff concludes that even with implementation of all feasible mitigation measures, impacts on certain environmental resources would remain significant and unavoidable. The technical disciplines with either LORS compliance and/or significant impacts determinations include:

Biological Resources: staff concludes that with implementation of proposed conditions of certification, the project could comply with all applicable laws. Most direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on biological resources would be avoided, minimized, or mitigated to less than significant levels. Desert tortoise is the only state and federally listed endangered species that would be taken by the proposed project; these impacts, as well as impacts to species of special concern, can be fully mitigated with the mitigation proposed. Waters of the U.S. and waters of the state would be directly impacted by the proposed project, but these impacts would be reduced to less than significant with implementation of conditions of certification. Feasible mitigation measures are recommended by staff to lessen impacts on avian species from exposure to solar flux and potential collisions with project features. However, impacts on avian species are still considered significant and unavoidable.

Cultural Resources: Staff concludes there would be significant and unavoidable impacts to several historical resources, including: an archaeological landscape (the Pahrump Metapatch Mesquite Woodland-Coppice Dune Archaeological Landscape); three ethnographic landscapes (the Salt Song Landscape, Pahrump Paiute Home Landscape and Ma-hav Landscape); and, a historic transportation corridor (Old Spanish Trail–Mormon Road Northern Corridor). Feasible mitigation is reflected in the recommended cultural resources conditions of certification. However, no mitigation measures, individually or cumulatively, for impacts on these historical resources would reduce the impacts of the proposed project to a less than significant level.

Land Use: Staff concludes that the HHSEGS project would not be consistent with the County of Inyo General Plan, Zoning Ordinance and Renewable Energy Ordinance; the proposed project conflicts with these applicable land use plans. Staff has determined that the substantial size of the project, the degree of variation from local planning designations, and the presence of other potential impacts is a conflict with these LORS, and therefore causes a significant environmental impact under CEQA Guidelines Appendix G (Land Use and Planning).

Visual Resources: s Staff concludes that the proposed project would substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings. After implementing all recommended conditions of certification, the proposed project would still have significant and unavoidable direct and cumulative visual impacts. Staff also concludes that the project would not be consistent with several applicable goals and policies of the Inyo County General Plan and Renewable Energy Ordinance.

AVAILABILITY OF THE FINAL STAFF ASSESSMENT

You may download a copy of the FSA from the project web site:

<http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/hiddenhills/index.html>. Copies of the FSA are also available at the Energy Commission’s Library in Sacramento, the California State Library in Sacramento, and at public libraries in Eureka, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and San Diego. Additionally, copies of the FSA were mailed to the following public libraries:

Pahrump Community Library 701 East Street Pahrump, NV 89048		Inyo County Library 168 North Edwards St. Independence, CA 93626
Bishop Branch Library 210 Academy St. Bishop, CA 93514		Inyo County Library 410 Hot Springs Rd Tecopa, CA 92389
Barstow Branch Library 304 E Buena Vista Street Barstow, CA 92311-2806		Las Vegas Library 833 Las Vegas Blvd North Las Vegas, NV 89101

Also, a copy of the FSA has been sent to those public agencies that would normally have jurisdiction except for the Energy Commission’s exclusive authority to certify sites and related facilities.

PUBLIC RESOURCES, CONTACT INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you desire information on how to participate in the Energy Commission's review of the proposed project, please contact 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. To request special accommodations for those persons with disabilities, please contact Lourdes Quiroz at lquiroz@energy.ca.gov or by telephone (916) 654-5146. If you would like a paper copy or CD of the FSA, please contact Cenne Jackson, California Energy Commission Project Assistant, by e-mail at cenne.jackson@energy.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Date: 12/21/12

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

Mailed to lists: Property Owners / Library
cc: Docket and Proof of Service List