

## 3.10 Land Use and Planning

This section provides information regarding current land use, land use designations, and land use policies within and in the vicinity of the VEGA 6 project site and Ramon Substation expansion area. Section 15125(d) of the CEQA Guidelines states that “[t]he EIR shall discuss any inconsistencies between the project and applicable general plans and regional plans.” This section fulfills this requirement for the project. In this context, this section reviews the land use assumptions, designations, and policies of the applicable County General Plan and other applicable federal, state, and local requirements, which govern land use within the project area and evaluates the project’s potential to conflict with policies adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating significant environmental effects. Where appropriate, mitigation is applied, and the resulting level of impact identified.

### 3.10.1 Existing Conditions

#### VEGA 6

##### *Solar Energy Facility Site*

The solar energy facility site is located on approximately 320 acres of privately-owned vacant land on a single parcel (APN 034-160-002) in the unincorporated area of Imperial County, CA. The site is located approximately 6 miles south of the southern-most edge of the Salton Sea; 10 miles west of the City of Brawley; and approximately 5 miles southwest of the community of Westmorland. The solar energy facility site is located directly south of Andre Road and 0.50 mile west of the Westside Main Canal.

As shown in Figure 3.10-1, the solar energy facility site’s land use designation is Agriculture under the County’s General Plan. As shown in Figure 3.10-2, the solar energy facility site is currently zoned Open Space/Preservation (S-2).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the County adopted the Renewable Energy and Transmission Element, which includes a RE Zone (RE Overlay Map). The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of renewable energy facilities while minimizing the impact on other established uses. As shown in Figure 2-1, the solar energy facility site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone. The project applicant is requesting a General Plan Amendment and Zone Change to include/classify the solar energy facility site (APN No. 034-160-002) into the RE Overlay Zone. Further, implementation of the project would require the approval of a CUP by the County to allow for the construction and operation of the proposed solar energy facility with an integrated battery storage system.

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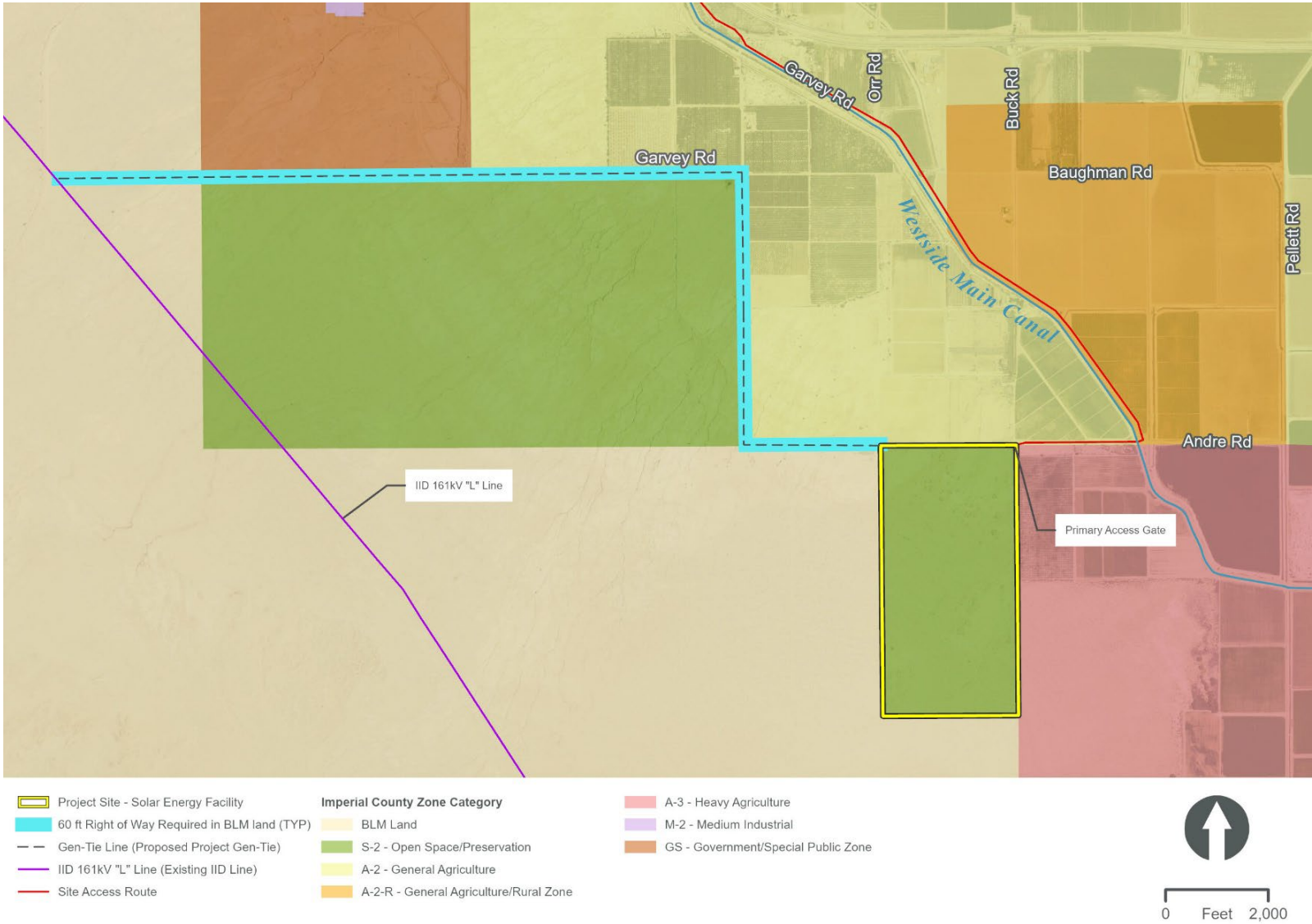
Figure 3.10-1. General Plan Land Use Designations



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Figure 3.10-2. Zoning Designations



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### Gen-Tie Line

The proposed project includes an approximately 4-mile gen-tie transmission line that would connect to the IID's existing 161 kV "L" Line. The entire gen-tie route would be on federal lands managed by the BLM within the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) planning area (Figure 3.10-3). The CDCA is a 25-million-acre expanse of land in Southern California designated by the Congress in 1976 through the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Approximately 10 million acres of the CDCA are administered by BLM under its CDCA Plan.

The BLM prepared a Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) to the CDCA Plan as part of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). The DRECP was developed to facilitate the timely and streamlined permitting of renewable energy projects. The BLM designates Renewable Energy Development Focus Areas (DFA) which are on BLM-administered lands within which solar, wind, and geothermal renewable energy development and associated activities are allowable uses and that have been determined to be of low or lower resource conflict. The intent is to incentivize and streamline such development in these areas. Transmission development and operation will occur in previously designated corridors and other identified areas, both inside and outside the DFAs.

As shown in Figure 3.10-4, the western portion of the gen-tie line is located within a Renewable Energy DFA.

### Ramon Substation Expansion

The existing Ramon Substation is located on a single parcel (APN 651-230-015) in unincorporated Riverside County, generally northeast of Cathedral City, north of the Interstate-10 Freeway. The existing substation currently occupies approximately 6.7 acres of the 11.26-acre parcel. As shown in Figure 3.10-3, the proposed upgrades would involve expansion of an approximately 4-acre area immediately adjacent to the existing substation. Immediately west of the existing Ramon Substation and proposed expansion area is the existing SCE Mirage Substation. The nearest residences to the proposed expansion area are located west of the existing SCE Mirage Substation along Via Las Palmas and the Tri Palm Estates development along Ramon Road to the southwest.

The Ramon Substation expansion area is located within the Western Coachella Valley Area Plan (WCVAP) and is designated Rural Residential (RR) in the Riverside County General Plan (County of Riverside 2021).

The Riverside County Zoning Ordinance, which is part of the County's Municipal Code, assigns a zoning designation to all properties within the County's boundaries. The Ramon Substation expansion area is zoned General Residential Zone (R-3). The Riverside County Zoning Ordinance does not identify public utilities as a permitted or conditional use in R-3. However, per Section 17.208.010, facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy is permitted with a Public Use Permit:

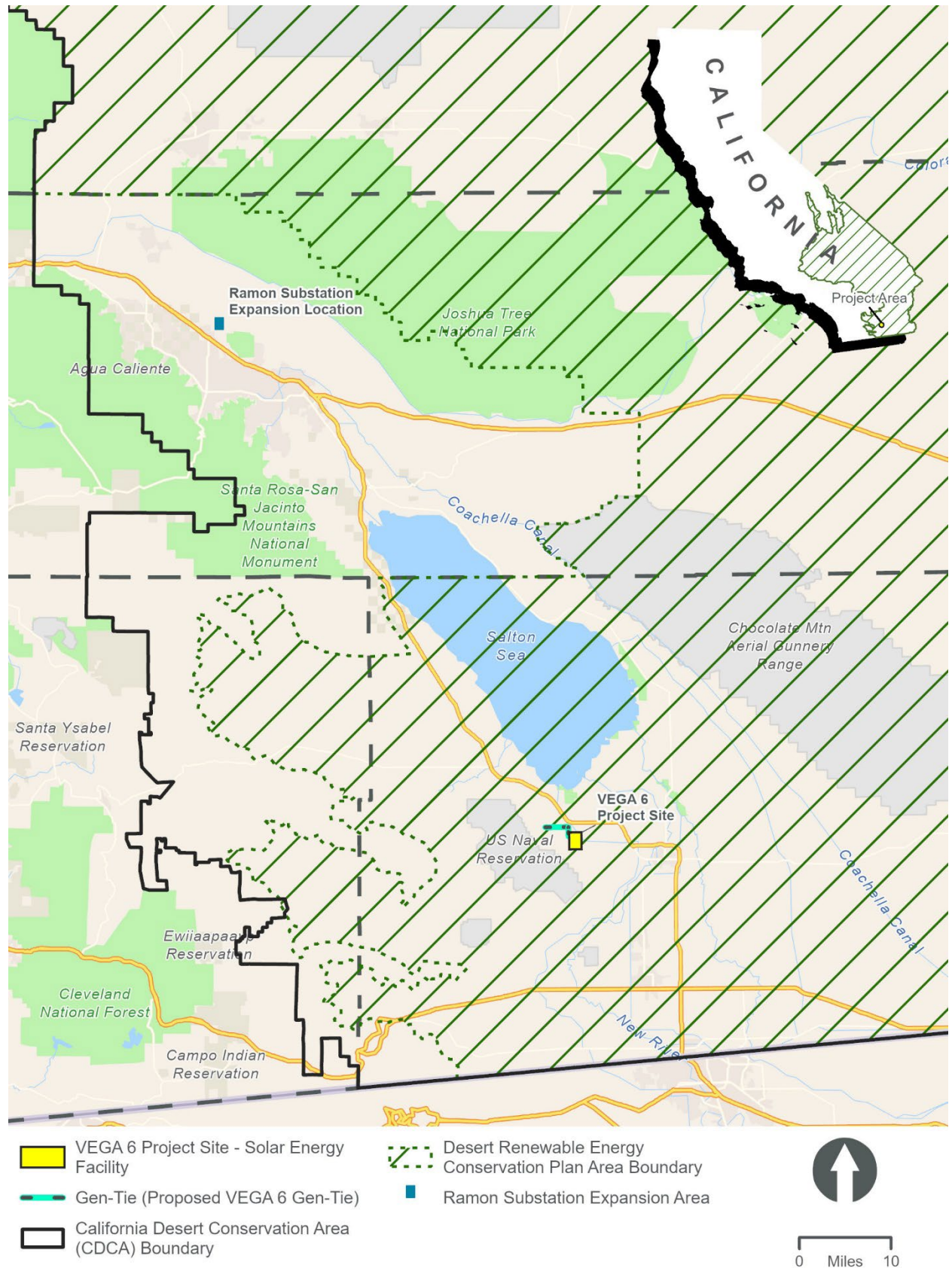
*Facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy where the County is not preempted by law from exercising jurisdiction. This subsection shall take precedence over and supersede any conflicting provision in any zone classification. Facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy shall not be subject to the development standards of the zone classification in which they are located.*

The existing Ramon Substation is currently operating under an approved Public Use Permit.

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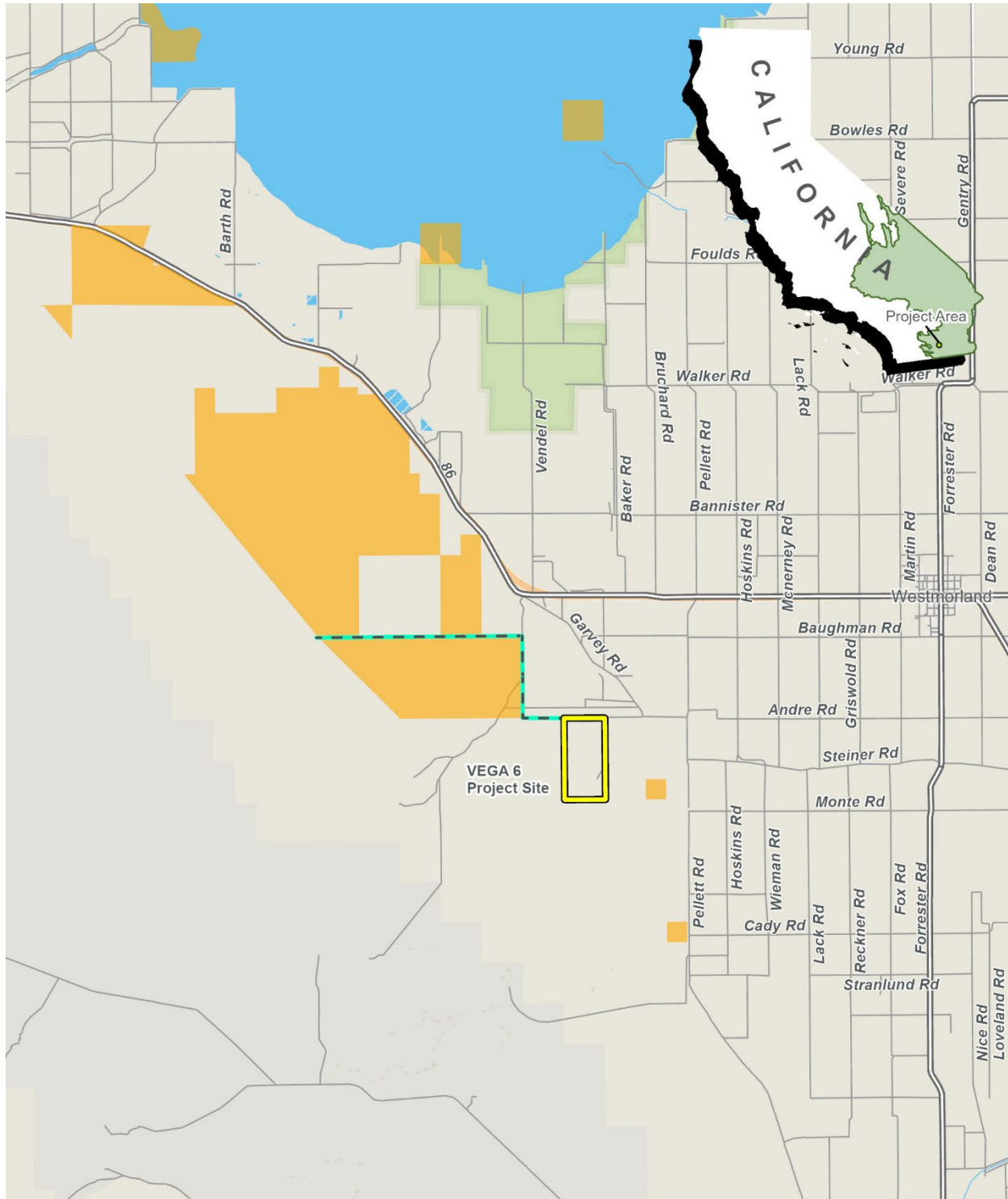


**Figure 3.10-3. CDCA and DRECP Planning Areas**



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Figure 3.10-4. DRECP Renewable Energy DFA



-  VEGA 6 Project Site – Solar Energy Facility
-  Gen-Tie (Proposed VEGA 6 Gen-Tie)
- Renewable Energy Development Designation**
-  Development Focus Areas



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### 3.10.2 Regulatory Setting

This section identifies and summarizes federal, state, and local laws, policies, and regulations that are applicable to the project.

#### Federal

##### *Federal Land Policy and Management Act*

The United States Congress passed the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) in 1976. Title V, “Rights-of-Way” of the FLPMA establishes public land policy, guidelines for administration, provides for management, protection, development, and enhancement of public lands, and provides the BLM authorization to grant right-of-way. Authorization of systems for generation, transmission, and distribution of electric energy is addressed in Section 501(4) of Title V. In addition, Section 503 specifically addresses “Right of Way Corridors” and requires common right-of-ways “to the extent practical”. FLPMA, Title V, Section 501(a)(6) states, “The Secretary, with respect to the public lands (including public lands, as defined in section 103(e) of this Act, which are reserved from entry pursuant to section 24 of the Federal Power Act (16 U.S.C. 818)) [P.L. 102-486, 1992] and, the Secretary of Agriculture, with respect to lands within the National Forest System (except in each case land designated as wilderness), are authorized to grant, issue, or renew rights-of-way over, upon, under, or through such lands for roads, trails, highways, railroads, canals, tunnels, tramways, airways, livestock driveways, or other means of transportation except where such facilities are constructed and maintained in connection with commercial recreation facilities on lands in the National Forest System” (BLM 2016). The proposed right-of-way request associated with the VEGA 6 project is subject to review and approval by the BLM.

##### *California Desert Conservation Area Plan*

Section 601 of the FLPMA required preparation of a long-range plan for the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). The CDCA Plan was adopted in 1980 to provide for the use of public lands and resources of the CDCA in a manner which enhances wherever possible and, which does not diminish, on balance, the environmental, cultural, and aesthetic values of the Desert and its productivity. The CDCA Plan is a comprehensive, long-range plan covering 25 million-acres. Approximately 12 million acres of this total are public lands administered by the BLM on behalf of the CDCA. These public lands are dispersed throughout the California Desert which includes the Mojave Desert, the Sonoran Desert and a small portion of the Great Basin Desert. The 12 million acres of public lands administered by the BLM make-up approximately half of the CDCA. The CDCA is applicable to the federal (i.e., BLM) actions associated with implementation of the proposed VEGA 6 project (the portion of the project [gen-tie line] not otherwise located on private lands).

##### *Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan*

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is a collaborative, interagency landscape-scale planning effort covering 22.5 million acres of the Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran desert regions within seven California counties including Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The plan was developed through a collaborative effort by the Renewable Energy Action Team Agencies (REAT Agencies; also known as the DRECP partner agencies), which consists of the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Energy Commission (CEC), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW). The vision for the DRECP is to (US Bureau of Land Management 2016):

1. Advance federal and state natural resource conservation goals and other federal land management goals.
2. Meet the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) and Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).
3. Facilitate the timely and streamlined permitting of renewable energy projects.

The DRECP Area contains both federal and non-federal California desert land. Some of these lands are designated as California Desert Conservation Areas. The federal portion of the plan area was released by the BLM as a Land Use Plan Amendment. The DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment supports the conservation goals of the DRECP and organizes land into ecoregions and subregions with specific management goals, objectives, allowable uses, and management actions for biological and cultural resources. The BLM designates Areas of Critical Environmental Concern where special management attention is needed to protect important historical, cultural, and scenic values, or fish and wildlife or other natural resources. The BLM also designates Renewable Energy Development Focus Areas which are on BLM-administered lands within which solar, wind, and geothermal renewable energy development and associated activities are allowable uses and that have been determined to be of low or lower resource conflict. The intent is to incentivize and streamline such development in these areas.

## State

### *State Planning and Zoning Laws*

California Government Code Section 65300 et seq. establishes the obligation of cities and counties to adopt and implement general plans. The general plan is a comprehensive, long-term, and general document that describes plans for the physical development of a city or county and of any land outside its boundaries that, in the city's or county's judgment, bears relation to its planning.

The general plan addresses a broad range of topics, including, at a minimum, land use, circulation, housing, conservation, open space, noise, and safety. In addressing these topics, the general plan identifies the goals, objectives, policies, principles, standards, and plan proposals that support the city's or county's vision for the area. The general plan is a long-range document that typically addresses the physical character of an area over a 20-year period or more.

The State Zoning Law (California Government Code Section 65800 et seq.) establishes that zoning ordinances, which are laws that define allowable land uses within a specific zone district, are required to be consistent with the general plan and any applicable specific plans.

## Regional

### *Southern California Association of Governments – 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (Connect SoCal)*

SCAG is the designated metropolitan planning organization for Los Angeles, Ventura, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Imperial Counties. CEQA requires that regional agencies like SCAG review projects and plans throughout its jurisdiction. SCAG, as the region's "Clearinghouse," collects information on projects of varying size and scope to provide a central point to monitor regional activity. SCAG has the responsibility of reviewing dozens of projects, plans, and programs every month. Projects and plans that are regionally significant must demonstrate to SCAG their consistency with a range of adopted regional plans and policies.

On September 3, 2020, SCAG adopted the 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal). The 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal) includes a strong commitment to reduce emissions from transportation sources to comply with Senate Bill 375, improve public health, and meet the NAAQS as set forth by the federal CAA. The following goals from the 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal) are considered applicable to the proposed project:

- Goal 5: Reduce GHG emissions and improve air quality
- Goal 10: Promote conservation of natural and agricultural lands and restoration of habitats

## Local

### *Imperial County General Plan*

The purpose of the County's General Plan (as amended through 2008) is to direct growth, particularly urban development, to areas where public infrastructure exists or can be provided, where public health and safety hazards are limited, and where impacts on the County's abundant natural, cultural, and economic resources can be avoided. The following 10 elements comprise the County's General Plan: Land Use; Housing; Circulation and Scenic Highways; Noise; Seismic and Public Safety; Conservation and Open Space; Agricultural; Renewable Energy and Transmission Element; Water; and Parks and Recreation. Together, these elements satisfy the seven mandatory general plan elements as established in the California Government Code. Goals, objectives, and implementing policies and actions programs have been established for each of the elements.

Imperial County received funding from the CEC's Renewable Energy and Conservation Planning Grant to amend and update the County's General Plan in order to facilitate future development of renewable energy projects. The Geothermal/Alternative Energy and Transmission Element was last updated in 2006. Since then, there have been numerous renewable projects proposed, approved and constructed within Imperial County as a result of California's move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, develop alternative fuel sources and implement its Renewable Portfolio Standard. The County has recently prepared an update to the Geothermal/Alternative Energy and Transmission Element of its General Plan, called the Renewable Energy and Transmission Element. This Element is designed to provide guidance and approaches with respect to the future siting of renewable energy projects and electrical transmission lines in the County. The County adopted this element in 2016.

The RE and Transmission Element includes a RE Zone (RE Overlay Map). The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the RE Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of RE projects, with an approved CUP. The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of RE facilities while minimizing the impact to other established uses. As previously mentioned, the VEGA 6 project site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone.

An analysis of the project's consistency with the General Plan goals and objectives relevant to the project is provided in Table 3.10-1. While this EIR analyzes the project's consistency with the General Plan pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15125(d), the Imperial County Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors retain final authority for the determination of the VEGA 6 project's consistency with the General Plan.

**Table 3.10-1. Project Consistency with Applicable General Plan Policies**

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
<b>Land Use Element</b>		
<p>Public Facilities, Objective 8.7. Ensure the development, improvement, timing, and location of community sewer, water, and drainage facilities will meet the needs of existing communities and new developing areas.</p>	<p>Consistent</p>	<p>The project includes the necessary supporting infrastructure and would not require new community-based infrastructure. The project would be required to construct supporting drainage consistent with County requirements and mitigation measures prescribed in Section 3.9, Hydrology/Water Quality, of the EIR.</p> <p>Once the project is operational, water would be required for solar panel washing and fire protection. The project would receive water service from the IID. Water would be purchased from the IID and delivered to the project site by water trucks. The proposed project would not require an operations and maintenance building. Therefore, no septic or other wastewater disposal systems would be required for the project.</p>
<p>Public Facilities, Objective 8.8. Ensure that the siting of future facilities for the transmission of electricity, gas, and telecommunications is compatible with the environment and County regulation.</p>	<p>Consistent</p>	<p>The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the Renewable Energy Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects with an approved CUP. The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of renewable energy facilities while minimizing the impact on other established uses. CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone.</p> <p>The County's General Plan and Land Use Ordinance allows that for renewable energy projects proposed on land classified in a non-RE Overlay zone, that the land on which the project is located may be included/classified in the RE Overlay Zone if the renewable energy project: 1) would be located adjacent to an existing RE Overlay Zone; 2) is not located in a sensitive area; 3) is located in proximity to renewable energy infrastructure; and, 4) and would not result in any significant environmental impacts.</p> <p>The project site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the applicant is requesting a General Plan Amendment to include/classify the site into the RE Overlay Zone. With the approval of a General Plan Amendment, CUP, and zone change, the proposed solar project can be implemented.</p>
<p>Public Facilities, Objective 8.9. Require necessary public utility rights-of-way when appropriate.</p>	<p>Consistent</p>	<p>The project would include the dedication of necessary ROW to facilitate the placement of electrical distribution and transmission infrastructure.</p>





General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Protection of Environmental Resources, Objective 9.6. Incorporate the strategies of the Imperial County AQAP in land use planning decisions and as amended.	Consistent	Because of the minimal grading of the site during construction and limited travel over the site during operations, local vegetation is anticipated to remain largely intact which will assist in dust suppression. Furthermore, dust suppression will be implemented including the use of water and soil binders during construction. Section 3.3, Air Quality, discusses the project's consistency with the AQAP in more detail.
<b><i>Circulation and Scenic Highways Element</i></b>		
Safe, Convenient, and Efficient Transportation System, Objective 1.1. Maintain and improve the existing road and highway network, while providing for future expansion and improvement based on travel demand and the development of alternative travel modes.	Consistent	Once construction is completed, the project would be remotely operated, controlled and monitored and with no requirement for daily onsite employees. The project would include limited operational vehicle trips and would not be expected to reduce the current level of service at affected intersections, roadway segments, and highways. The project does not propose any forms for residential or commercial development and therefore would not require new forms of alternative transportation to minimize impacts on existing roadways.
Safe, Convenient, and Efficient Transportation System, Objective 1.2. Require a traffic analysis for any new development which may have a significant impact on County roads.	Consistent	As described in Section 3.13 Transportation/Circulation, project operations would have a less than significant impact on the circulation network.
<b><i>Noise Element</i></b>		
Noise Environment. Objective 1.3. Control noise levels at the source where feasible.	Consistent	Where construction-related and operational noise would occur in close proximity to noise sensitive land uses (e.g., less than 500 feet), the County would condition the project to maintain conformance with County noise standards.
Project/Land Use Planning. Goal 2: Review Proposed Actions for noise impacts and require design which will provide acceptable indoor and outdoor noise environments.	Consistent	The project would be required to comply with the County's noise standards during both construction and operation.
<b><i>Conservation and Open Space Element</i></b>		
Conservation of Environmental Resources for Future Generations Goal 1: Environmental resources shall be conserved for future generations by minimizing environmental impacts in all land use decisions and educating the public on their value.	Consistent	The project site would be converted from undeveloped land to a solar energy facility. The proposed project is a response to the state's need for renewable energy to meet its Renewable Portfolio Standard, and while it would increase the availability of renewable energy, it would also replace existing sources of non-renewable energy.  The power generated by the proposed project would be added to the state's electricity grid with the intent that it would displace fossil fueled power plants and their associated environmental impacts (i.e., air quality and GHG emissions). The proposed project would ensure future generations have access to a broad array of renewable

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
		energy sources, providing the public with alternative choices to fossil fuels.
<p>Conservation of Biological Resources. Goal 2: The County will integrate programmatic strategies for the conservation of critical habitats to manage their integrity, function, productivity, and long-term viability.</p>	Consistent	<p>A biological resources survey was conducted for the project site. As discussed in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, there are sensitive biological resources located within the project site. However, with the implementation of mitigation identified in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, these impacts would be reduced to a level less than significant.</p>
<p>Preservation of Cultural Resources. Objective 3.1: Protect and preserve sites of archaeological, ecological, historical, and scientific value, and/or cultural significance.</p>	Consistent	<p>A cultural resource inventory was prepared for the project site. As discussed in Section 3.5, Cultural Resources, the proposed project has the potential to encounter undocumented archaeological resources and human remains. However, with the implementation of mitigation identified in Section 3.5, Cultural Resources, these potential impacts would be reduced to a level less than significant.</p>
<p>Conservation of Water Resources. Objective 6.1: Ensure the use and protection of all the rivers, waterways, and groundwater sources in the County for use by future generations.</p>	Consistent	<p>As discussed in Section 3.9, Hydrology/Water Quality, the project will prepare a site-specific drainage plan and water quality management plan to minimize adverse effects to local water resources; as well as coordinate with the IID for water consumption during construction and operation of the project.</p>
<p>Protection of Air Quality and Addressing Climate Change. Goal 7: The County shall actively seek to improve the quality of air in the region.</p>	Consistent	<p>The proposed project would be required to comply with all applicable ICAPCD rules and requirements during construction and operation to reduce air emissions. Overall, the proposed project would improve air quality and reduce GHG emissions by reducing the amount of emissions that would be generated in association with electricity production from a fossil fuel burning facility. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with this goal.</p>
<p>Protection of Air Quality and Addressing Climate Change. Objective 7.1: Ensure that all project and facilities comply with current Federal, State and local requirements for attainment of air quality objectives.</p>	Consistent	<p>The proposed project would comply with current federal and State requirements for attainment for air quality objectives through conformance with all applicable ICAPCD rules and requirements to reduce fugitive dust and emissions. Further, the proposed project would comply with the ICAPCD Air Quality CEQA Handbook's Mandatory Standard Air Quality Measures. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with this objective.</p>
<p>Protection of Air Quality and Addressing Climate Change. Objective 7.2: Develop management strategies to mitigate fugitive dust. Cooperate with all federal and state agencies in the effort to attain air quality objectives.</p>	Consistent	<p>The Applicant would cooperate with all federal and State agencies in the effort to attain air quality objectives through compliance with the ICAPCD Air Quality CEQA Handbook's Mandatory Standard Air Quality Measures. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with this objective.</p>



General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Protection of Open Space and Recreational Opportunities. Objective 8.2: Focus all new renewable energy development within adopted Renewable Energy Overlay Zones.	Consistent	The project site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone. The project applicant is requesting a General Plan Amendment and Zone Change to include/classify the project site into the RE Overlay Zone. With the approval of the General Plan Amendment, Zone Change, and CUP, the proposed solar project can be implemented.
<b>Renewable Energy and Transmission Element</b>		
Objective 1.4: Analyze potential impacts on agricultural, natural, and cultural resources, as appropriate.	Consistent	This EIR has been prepared to meet the requirements of CEQA for purposes of evaluating the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed project, which includes analysis on applicable environmental topics that analyze impacts on agricultural, natural, and cultural resources.
Objective 1.5: Require appropriate mitigation and monitoring for environmental issues associated with developing renewable energy facilities.	Consistent	Please refer to Section 6.0, Effects Found Not to be Significant, for a description of existing agricultural resources within the project site and a discussion of potential impacts attributable to the project. A Biological Technical Report has been prepared for the project, which is summarized in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, along with potential impacts attributable to the project. With incorporation of mitigation identified in Section 3.4, Biological Resources, less than significant impacts would result.
Objective 1.6: Encourage the efficient use of water resources required in the operation of renewable energy generation facilities.	Consistent	Water use during construction would be used primarily for dust control and obtained from <u>groundwater well(s) constructed as part of the proposed project. The construction of the groundwater well(s) is subject to approval of a conditional use permit (CUP 22-0027) as identified in EIR Section 2.5 Required Project Approvals.</u> <del>local IID irrigation canals or laterals in conformance with IID construction water acquisition requirements. The project applicant will also coordinate with IID to purchase water needed for maintenance activities (i.e., PV module washing) to ensure efficient use of water resources.</del>
Objective 1.7: Assure that development of renewable energy facilities and transmission lines comply with Imperial County Air Pollution Control District's regulations and mitigation measures.	Consistent	Because of the minimal grading of the site during construction and limited travel over the site during operations, local vegetation is anticipated to remain largely intact which will assist in dust suppression. Furthermore, dust suppression will be implemented including the use of water and soil binders during construction. Section 3.3, Air Quality, discusses the project's consistency with the ICAPCD in more detail.
Objective 2.1: To the extent practicable, maximize utilization of IID's transmission capacity in existing easements or rightsof-way. Encourage the location of all major transmission lines within designated corridors easements, and rights-of-way.	Consistent	The project involves the construction and operation of new renewable energy infrastructure that would interconnect with existing and approved IID transmission infrastructure thereby maximizing the use of existing facilities.

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
<b><i>Seismic and Public Safety Element</i></b>		
Land Use Planning and Public Safety. Goal 1: Include public health and safety considerations in land use planning.	Consistent	<p>Division 5 of the County Land Use Ordinance has established procedures and standards for development within earthquake fault zones. Per County regulations, construction of buildings intended for human occupancy which are located across the trace of an active fault are prohibited. An exception exists when such buildings located near the fault or within a designated Special Studies Zone are demonstrated through a geotechnical analysis and report not to expose a person to undue hazard created by the construction.</p> <p>Since the project site is located in a seismically active area, the project is required to be designed in accordance with the CBC for near source factors derived from a design basis earthquake based on a peak ground acceleration of 0.48 gravity. It should be noted that, the project would be remotely operated and would not require any habitable structures on site. In considering these factors in conjunction with mitigation requirements outlined in the impact analysis, the risks associated with seismic hazards would be minimized.</p> <p>A preliminary geotechnical report has been prepared for the proposed project. The preliminary geotechnical report is summarized in Section 3.6 Geology and Soils.</p>
Land Use Planning and Public Safety. Objective 1.1: Ensure that data on geological hazards is incorporated into the land use review process, and future development process.		
Land Use Planning and Public Safety. Objective 1.3: Regulate development adjacent to or near all mineral deposits and geothermal operations.		
Land Use Planning and Public Safety. Objective 1.4: Require, where possessing the authority, that avoidable seismic risks be avoided; and that measures, commensurate with risks, be taken to reduce injury, loss of life, destruction of property, and disruption of service.		
Land Use Planning and Public Safety. Objective 1.7: Require developers to provide information related to geologic and seismic hazards when siting a proposed project.		
Emergency Preparedness. Goal 2: Minimize potential hazards to public health, safety, and welfare and prevent the loss of life and damage to health and property resulting from both natural and human-related phenomena.		
Emergency Preparedness. Objective 2.2: Reduce risk and damage due to seismic hazards by appropriate regulation.		
Emergency Preparedness. Objective 2.5: Minimize injury, loss of life, and damage to property by implementing all state codes where applicable.		
Emergency Preparedness. Objective 2.8: Prevent and reduce death, injuries, property damage, and economic and social dislocation resulting from natural hazards including flooding, land subsidence, earthquakes, other geologic phenomena, levee or dam failure, urban and wildland fires and building collapse by appropriate planning and emergency measures.		
<b><i>Water Element</i></b>		



General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Protection of Water Resources from Hazardous Materials. Program: The County of Imperial shall make every reasonable effort to limit or preclude the contamination or degradation of all groundwater and surface water resources in the County.	Consistent	Mitigation measures will require that the applicant of the proposed project prepare a site-specific drainage plan and water quality management plan to minimize adverse effects to local water resources.
Protection of Water Resources from Hazardous Materials. Program: All development proposals brought before the County of Imperial shall be reviewed for potential adverse effects on water quality and quantity and shall be required to implement appropriate mitigation measures for any significant impacts.	Consistent	See previous response for Water Element above.
<b>Housing Element</b>		
<b>Not Applicable.</b> The proposed project is a solar energy project and does not include the development of housing.		

Source: ICPDS 2008

Note: AQAP – air quality attainment plan; CUP – conditional use permit; EIR – environmental impact report; GV – growth visioning; ICAPCD – Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; IID – Imperial Irrigation District; MW – megawatt; RE – renewable energy; ROW – right-of-way;

### County of Imperial Land Use Ordinance

The County’s Land Use Ordinance provides the physical land use planning criteria for development within the jurisdiction of the County. The Land Use Ordinance identifies the permitted and conditional uses within a zoning designation. Uses identified as conditionally permitted require a CUP, which is subject to the discretionary approval of the County Board of Supervisors per a recommendation by the County Planning Commission.

**S-2 Zoning.** As shown in Figure 3.10-2, the solar energy facility site is located on a privately-owned parcel zoned S-2. Pursuant to Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 19 (County of Imperial 2020), the following uses are permitted in the S-2 zone subject to approval of a CUP from Imperial County:

- d) *Communication Towers: including radio, television, cellular, digital, along with the necessary support equipment such as receivers, transmitters, antennas, satellite dishes, relays, etc.*
- i) *Major facilities relating to the generation and transmission of electrical energy provide[d] such facilities are not under State or Federal law, to [be] approved exclusively by an agency, or agencies of the State or Federal government, and provided such facilities shall be approved subsequent to coordination review of the Imperial Irrigation District for electrical matters. Such uses shall include but be limited to the following:*
  - *Electrical generation plants*
  - *Facilities for the transmission of electrical energy (100-200 kV)*
  - *Electrical substations in an electrical transmission system (500 kv/230 kv/161 kV)*

**Height Limit.** Section 90519.07 of the Land Use Ordinance states that the “Maximum height limit in the S-2 zone shall be 40 feet, except for communication towers which are 100 feet.” The height of the

components on the solar energy facility site (solar panels, BESS, and substation) would be less than 40 feet.

**RE Resources.** According to Title 9, Division 17 of the Land Use Ordinance, the purpose of the RE Resources regulations are to “facilitate the beneficial use of renewable energy resources for the general welfare of the people of Imperial County and the State of California; to protect renewable energy resources from wasteful or detrimental uses; and to protect people, property, and the environment from detriments that might result from the improper use of renewable energy resources” (County of Imperial 2017).

Title 9, Division 17, includes the RE Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects, with an approved CUP. Uses that are conditionally permitted require a CUP subject to the discretionary approval of the County Board of Supervisors (Board) per a recommendation by the County Planning Commission.

#### *Imperial County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan*

The Imperial County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP) provides the criteria and policies used by the Imperial County Airport Land Use Commission to assess compatibility between the principal airports in Imperial County and proposed land use development in the areas surrounding the airports. The ALUCP emphasizes review of local general and specific plans, zoning ordinances, and other land use documents covering broad geographic areas.

The nearest public airport is the Brawley Municipal Airport located approximately 9.8 miles southeast of the project site. The project site is outside of the airport compatibility zones of the Brawley Municipal Airport (County of Imperial 1996).

#### *County of Riverside General Plan*

The County of Riverside General Plan is a policy document that reflects the County’s vision for the future of Riverside County. The General Plan was comprehensively revised in 2003 and most recently updated in 2021. The General Plan is organized into nine separate elements: Land Use, Circulation, Multipurpose Open Space, Safety, Noise, Housing, Air Quality, Healthy Communities, and Administration. Each General Plan Element is instrumental to achieving the County’s long-term development goals. Each element contains a series of policies that guide the course of action the County must take to achieve the County’s vision for future development (County of Riverside 2021).

In addition, the General Plan divides the County into 19 Area Plans. The purpose of these Area Plans is to provide more detailed land use and policy direction regarding local issues such as land use, circulation, open space, and other topical areas. The Ramon Substation expansion area is located within the WCVAP of the General Plan.

#### *Western Coachella Valley Area Plan*

As stated above, the project site is located within the WCVAP of the General Plan. The WCVAP is not a standalone document, but rather an extension of the County of Riverside General Plan. It provides a customized direction specifically for this planning area. The WCVAP provides a description of the location, physical characteristic, and special features, in addition to a land use plan, policies, and exhibits to better understand the physical, environmental, and regulatory characteristics that comprise the area.

### *Riverside County Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan*

The Riverside County ALUCP was adopted in October 2004 and establishes policies applicable to land use compatibility planning in the vicinity of airports throughout the County containing compatibility criteria and maps for the influence areas of individual airports. The ALUCP establishes safety zones that limit building heights, restrict hazardous materials and fuel tanks, bird-attracting industries, etc., from close proximity to airport runways. The Ramon Substation expansion area is located outside of Palm Springs International Airport's airport influence area (County of Riverside 2005). Thus, the Ramon Substation expansion would not require review by the Riverside County Airport Land Use Commission (ALUC).

### *Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan*

The Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan (CVMSHCP) received its California state permit in September 2008 and its federal permit in October 2008. The CVMSHCP is a comprehensive habitat conservation-planning program focusing on preservation of species and their associated habitats within the Coachella Valley region of Riverside County. Signatories to the CVMSHCP include the cities of Cathedral City, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs (I-10 annexation area only), Indian Wells, Indio, La Quinta, Palm Desert, Palm Springs, Rancho Mirage as well as Coachella Valley Water District, Imperial Irrigation District, Coachella Valley Association of Governments, and Caltrans. The intent of the CVMSHCP is to preserve native vegetation and meet the habitat needs of multiple species, rather than focusing preservation efforts on one species at a time. As such, the CVMSHCP is intended to streamline review of individual projects with respect to the species and habitats addressed in the CVMSHCP, and to provide for an overall Conservation Area that would be of greater benefit to biological resources than would result from a piecemeal regulatory approach.

The CVMSHCP provides coverage (including take authorization for listed species) for special-status plant and animal species, as well as mitigation for impacts to sensitive species. Through agreements with the USFWS and the CDFW, the CVMSHCP designates approximately 27 special-status animal and plant species that receive some level of coverage under the plan. Of the 27 covered species designated under the CVMSHCP, the majority of these species have no additional survey/conservation requirements. In addition, the CVMSHCP provides mitigation for project-specific impacts to these species so that the impacts would be reduced to below a level of significance pursuant to CEQA. Beyond the fully covered species, there are species with additional survey/conservation requirements (Coachella Valley Conservation Commission 2016).

Each participating city or local jurisdiction within the Coachella Valley region will impose a development mitigation fee for new development projects within its jurisdiction. As of July 1, 2023, the current fees for development are:

- \$1,625 for 0 to 8 residential units per acre
- \$675 for 8.1 to 14 residential units per acre
- \$300 for more than 14 residential units per acre
- \$7,225 per acre for commercial/industrial

Please refer to Section 3.4, Biological Resources, for a more thorough discussion of the CVMSHCP.

### *County of Riverside Zoning Ordinance*

The Riverside County Zoning Ordinance is intended to implement the Riverside County General Plan's Land Use Plan. The Zoning Ordinance identifies the permitted and conditional uses within each zoning designation.

### 3.10.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section presents the significance criteria used for considering project impacts related to land use and planning, the methodology employed for the evaluation, an impact evaluation, and mitigation requirements, if necessary.

#### Thresholds of Significance

Based on CEQA Guidelines Appendix G, project impacts related to land use and planning are considered significant if any of the following occur:

- Physically divide an established community
- Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect

### Impact Analysis

#### ***Impact 3.10-1 Would the project physically divide an established community?***

##### *VEGA 6*

The VEGA 6 project site is located in a sparsely populated portion of unincorporated Imperial County. The following residences are located in the VEGA 6 project vicinity:

- Residence located 2,725 feet from the northeastern corner of the solar energy facility site
- Residence located approximately 0.85 miles north of solar energy facility site, north of Buck Road/Garvey Road intersection
- Residence located approximately 1 mile north of solar energy facility site and approximately 0.66 mile from the gen-tie line, north of Baughman Road/Garvey Road intersection
- Residence located approximately 1.21 miles north of solar energy facility site, north of Orr Road/Garvey Road intersection and approximately 0.5 mile from the gen-tie line

However, there are no established residential communities located in the vicinity of the project site. The nearest established residential community is located approximately 4 miles northeast in the City of Westmorland. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not divide an established community and no impact would occur.

#### *Ramon Substation Expansion*

The Ramon Substation expansion area is on approximately 4 acres of vacant and undeveloped land, immediately north of the existing Ramon Substation. Immediately west of the existing Ramon Substation and proposed expansion area is the existing SCE Mirage Substation. The nearest residences to the proposed expansion area are located west of the existing SCE Mirage Substation along Via Las Palmas and the Tri Palm Estates development along Ramon Road to the southwest.



Generally, the physical division of an established community will occur as a result of the construction of a physical feature (such as a highway or railroad tracks), or the removal of a means of access (such as a local road or bridge) which will impair mobility within an existing community or between a community and outlying areas.

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require closures of public roads, which could inhibit vehicular access. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion does not include the construction of a major highway, railroad track, or other linear physical feature that will divide an existing community. Therefore, implementation of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not divide an established community and no impact would occur.

#### Mitigation Measure(s)

##### *VEGA 6*

No mitigation measures are required.

##### *Ramon Substation Expansion*

No mitigation measures are required.

#### ***Impact 3.10-2 Would the project cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?***

##### *VEGA 6*

##### **SCAG 2010-2045 RTP/SCS (CONNECT SOCAL)**

As noted above, the 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal) (SCAG 2020) identifies two goals which include reducing GHG emissions to improve air quality (Goal 5), and to promote conservation of natural and agricultural lands (Goal 10).

The 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal), identifies strategies to support the goal of reducing regional GHG and improve air quality. Strategies include leveraging technological innovations including incorporating solar energy, hydrogen fuel cell power storage, and power generation. Once in operation, the proposed project would contribute to SCAG's goal in reducing GHG emissions and improving air quality.

The 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal) also discusses the decline of agricultural land as an issue for the economy. According to the farmland maps prepared by the California Department of Conservation, no portion of the VEGA 6 project site is designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (DOC 2021). Additionally, the gen-tie route would not result in the conversion of agricultural land. As such, no Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, and Unique Farmland would be converted to non-agricultural uses with project implementation. No impacts due to a conflict with the 2020-2045 RTP/SCS (Connect SoCal) would occur.

##### **COUNTY OF IMPERIAL GENERAL PLAN**

The County's General Plan applies to the solar energy facility, battery storage system, gentie, and supporting infrastructure associated with the project. An analysis of the project's consistency with the General Plan goals and objectives relevant to the VEGA 6 project is provided in Table 3.10-1. As

summarized in Table 3.10-1, the proposed VEGA 6 project would be consistent with the goals and objectives contained in the General Plan.

The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the Renewable Energy Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects with an approved CUP. The RE Overlay Zone is concentrated in areas determined to be the most suitable for the development of renewable energy facilities while minimizing the impact on other established uses. CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone, and as stated in the Renewable Energy and Transmission Element:

CUP applications proposed for specific renewable energy projects not located in the RE Overlay Zone would not be allowed without an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone. An amendment to the overlay zone would only be approved by the County Board of Supervisors if a future renewable energy project met one of the following two conditions:

- 1) Adjacent to the Existing RE Overlay Zone: An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future renewable energy project located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
  - i. Is not located in a sensitive area
  - ii. Would not result in any significant impacts
- 2) “Island Overlay”: An amendment may be made to allow for development of a future renewable energy project that is not located adjacent to the existing RE Overlay Zone if the project:
  - i. Is located adjacent (sharing a common boundary) to an existing transmission source
  - ii. Consists of the expansion of an existing renewable energy operation
  - iii. Would not result in any significant environmental impacts

The solar energy facility site is located outside of the RE Overlay Zone. Therefore, the project applicant is seeking a Zone Change to include/classify the solar energy facility site into the RE Overlay Zone and approval of a CUP by the County to allow for the construction and operation of the proposed solar energy facility with an integrated battery storage system. The solar energy facility site is not located adjacent to an existing RE Overlay Zone; therefore, the VEGA 6 project will need to meet the criteria identified for the “Island Overlay” to obtain approval of an amendment to the RE Overlay Zone. Table 3.10-2 provides an analysis of the project’s consistency with the “Island Overlay” criteria.

With approval of the General Plan Amendment and Zone Change, the project applicant will be able to request for approval of a CUP to allow the construction and operation of the proposed solar facility.

**Table 3.10-2. Project Consistency with “Island Overlay” Criteria**

Criteria	Criteria Met?
Is located adjacent (sharing a common boundary) to an existing transmission source?	As described in Chapter 2, the VEGA 6 project includes a gen-tie line that would connect to IID’s existing 161 kV “L” Line. The gen-tie route would be approximately 4 miles long.



Criteria	Criteria Met?
Consists of the expansion of an existing renewable energy operation?	<p>As described in Chapter 2, the VEGA 6 project includes a gen-tie line that would connect to IID's existing 161 kV "L" Line. The gen-tie route would be approximately 4 miles long.</p> <p>The proposed VEGA 6 project would be capable of generating up to 80 MW of solar energy and include a 160 MW BESS, thereby expanding renewable energy generation in the area.</p>
Would not result in any significant environmental impacts?	As detailed in Sections 3.2 through 3.17 of this EIR, no unavoidable or unmitigable significant impacts were identified. Where significant impacts have been identified, mitigation measures are proposed, that when implemented, would reduce the impact level to less than significant. Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not result in a residual significant impact.

Note: EIR – environmental impact report; MW – megawatt; RE – renewable energy

**COUNTY OF IMPERIAL LAND USE ORDINANCE**

Development of the solar energy facility and supporting infrastructure is subject to the County’s zoning ordinance. The solar energy facility site is located on privately-owned vacant land on a single parcel (APN 034-160-002) zoned S-2. Pursuant to Title 9, Division 5, Chapter 19 (County of Imperial 2020), the following uses are permitted in the S-2 zone subject to approval of a CUP from Imperial County:

- d) Communication Towers: including radio, television, cellular, digital, along with the necessary support equipment such as receivers, transmitters, antennas, satellite dishes, relays, etc.*
- i) Major facilities relating to the generation and transmission of electrical energy provide[d] such facilities are not under State or Federal law, to [be] approved exclusively by an agency, or agencies of the State or Federal government, and provided such facilities shall be approved subsequent to coordination review of the Imperial Irrigation District for electrical matters. Such uses shall include but be limited to the following:*
  - *Electrical generation plants*
  - *Facilities for the transmission of electrical energy (100-200 kV)*
  - *Electrical substations in an electrical transmission system (500 kv/230 kv/161 kV)*

Therefore, with approval of a CUP, the proposed project would not conflict with the County’s zoning ordinance.

**IMPERIAL COUNTY AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY**

As previously discussed above, the nearest public airport is the Brawley Municipal Airport located approximately 9.8 miles southeast of the project site. According to Figure 3A (Compatibility Map – Brawley Municipal Airport) of the ALUCP, no portion of the VEGA 6 project site is located within the Brawley Municipal Airport land use compatibility zones (County of Imperial 1996). Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not conflict with the Imperial County ALUCP, and no significant impact would occur.

### DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

The DRECP was developed to facilitate the timely and streamlined permitting of renewable energy projects. The BLM designates Renewable Energy DFAs which are on BLM-administered lands within which solar, wind, and geothermal renewable energy development and associated activities are allowable uses and that have been determined to be of low or lower resource conflict. Transmission development and operation will occur in previously designated corridors and other identified areas, both inside and outside the DFAs.

As shown in Figure 3.10-4, the western portion of the gen-tie line is located within a Renewable Energy DFA. Therefore, the proposed gen-tie line would be an allowable use and would not conflict with the DRECP.

#### *Ramon Substation Expansion*

### RIVERSIDE COUNTY ZONING ORDINANCE

The Ramon Substation expansion area is zoned General Residential Zone (R-3). The Riverside County Zoning Ordinance does not identify public utilities as a permitted or conditional use in R-3. However, per Section 17.208.010, facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy is permitted with a Public Use Permit:

*Facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy where the County is not preempted by law from exercising jurisdiction. This subsection shall take precedence over and supersede any conflicting provision in any zone classification. Facilities for the storage or transmission of electrical energy shall not be subject to the development standards of the zone classification in which they are located.*

The existing Ramon Substation is currently operating under an approved Public Use Permit. IID would apply for an amendment to its Public Use Permit for the proposed Ramon Substation expansion. With approval of the Public Use Permit amendment, the proposed expansion would not conflict with the Riverside County Zoning Ordinance and no impact would occur.

### RIVERSIDE COUNTY AIRPORT LAND USE COMPATIBILITY PLAN

The Ramon Substation expansion area is located outside of Palm Springs International Airport's airport influence area (County of Riverside 2005). Therefore, the proposed expansion would not conflict with the Riverside County ALUCP, and no impact would occur.

#### Mitigation Measure(s)

##### VEGA 6

No mitigation measures are required.

#### *Ramon Substation Expansion*

No mitigation measures are required.

### 3.10.4 Decommissioning/Restoration and Residual Impacts

#### Decommissioning/Restoration

If at the end of the PPA term, no contract extension is available for a power purchaser, no other buyer of the energy emerges, or there is no further funding of the project, the project will be decommissioned and dismantled. No impacts on land use and planning are anticipated to occur during decommissioning and restoration of the project site. Decommissioning and restoration would not physically divide an established community or conflict with any applicable land use plan, policy, or regulation. Therefore, no impact is identified and no mitigation is required.

#### Residual

With the approval of a CUP and reclamation plan to address post-project decommissioning, the project would generally be consistent with applicable federal, state, regional, and local plans and policies. Based on these circumstances, the project would not result in any residual significant and unmitigable land use impacts.

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