3.2 Aesthetics

This section provides a description of the existing visual and aesthetic resources within the VEGA 6 project area and Ramon Substation expansion area, and relevant state and local plans and policies regarding the protection of scenic resources. Effects to the existing visual character of the VEGA 6 project area and Ramon Substation expansion area as a result of project-related facilities are considered and mitigation is proposed based on the anticipated level of significance. The information provided in this section for the VEGA 6 project is summarized from the *Visual Impact Assessment Letter Report – VEGA SES 6 Project* prepared by ECORP Consulting, Inc. This report is included in Appendix B of this EIR. The information provided in this section for the Ramon Substation expansion area is summarized from review of publicly available data including Caltrans' State Scenic Highway System Map, Riverside County General Plan, and Riverside County Municipal Code.

3.2.1 Existing Conditions

Visual Character

VEGA 6

Imperial County encompasses 4,597 square miles in the southeastern portion of California. The County is bordered by Riverside County on the north, the international border of Mexico on the south, San Diego County on the west and Arizona on the east. The length and breadth of the County provide for a variety of visual resources ranging from desert, sand hills, mountain ranges, and the Salton Sea. According to the Imperial County General Plan, the closest scenic resource is the Salton Sea approximately 11 miles northwest of the project site (County of Imperial 2016).

The desert includes several distinct areas that add beauty and contrast to the natural landscape. The barren desert landscape of the Yuha Desert, lower Borrego Valley, East Mesa, and Pilot Knob Mesa provide a dramatic contrast against the backdrop of the surrounding mountain ranges. The West Mesa area is a scenic desert bordered on the east by the Imperial Sand Dunes, the lower Borrego Valley, the East Mesa, and Pilot Knob Mesa.

The eastern foothills of the Peninsular Range are located on the west side of the County. The Chocolate Mountains, named to reflect their dark color, are located in the northeastern portion of the County, extending from the southeast to the northwest between Riverside County and the Colorado River. These mountains reach an elevation of 2,700 feet making them highly visible throughout the County.

The solar energy facility site is located on approximately 320 acres of privately-owned vacant and undeveloped land. The solar energy facility 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. Brawley and Westmorland are relatively central within the agricultural portion of the Imperial Valley, which extends from the southeastern portion of the Salton Sea to the United States and Mexico border. The proposed VEGA 6 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 Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) planning area.

Topography is relatively flat, with elevations ranging -39 meters (-129 feet) and -6 meters (-21 feet). The majority of the project site consists of creosote bush scrub, disturbed creosote bush scrub,

agriculture, and disturbed areas. Small portions of the solar energy facility site along the northwestern perimeter and centrally within the site contain areas of disturbed tamarisk thickets.

Views in this area are expansive and are generally characterized by sparse development. The VEGA 6 project site is located in a sparsely populated portion of unincorporated Imperial County. The nearest single-family residence is located 2,725 feet from the northeastern corner of the solar and battery storage project site. Adjacent land uses include Open Space/Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land to the west and south, and active agriculture to the north and east. The Westside Main Canal travels southeast to northwest and is located northeast and east of the site. Viewers would be limited to property owners and drivers using the nearby local roadways and SR 78/76.

KEY VIEWS

Aerial imagery was reviewed to identify where the proposed VEGA 6 project would potentially be visible from visually sensitive areas and selected preliminary viewpoints for site photography. A field survey was conducted in July 2021 to photo-document existing visual conditions in the project vicinity and surrounding area. Assessment of existing visual conditions were made based on professional judgment that took into consideration sensitive receptors and sensitive viewing areas in the project area.

Figure 3.2-1 illustrates the photo documented key views (KV) and the direction to which the photographs were taken. The photographs depicting the existing condition at the VEGA 6 project site are presented below. Descriptions of the existing KVs are as follows:

KV 1 – View from Andre Road. The view from KV 1 is from Andre Road, at the northeast corner of the solar energy facility site facing southwest (Figure 3.2-2). The dominant feature within this key view is the existing unpaved roadway in the foreground and sparse vegetation visible throughout the middle-ground. There are no striking topographic features visible within this key view. This view does not exhibit any striking or distinctive visual patterns and there are no scenic resources. Additionally, while existing unpaved roadways are present and distinguishable within this key view, it is free from encroaching man-made elements (Appendix B of this EIR).

KV 2 – View from Garvey Road. The view of KV 2 is from Garvey Road, west of the Westside Main Canal and the agricultural areas facing east (Figure 3.2-3). Similar to KV 1, the dominant feature within this key view is the existing paved roadway in the center throughout the view and sparse vegetation visible throughout the middleground. Also visible within this view is the existing electrical utility lines and poles on the left side of the roadway. This does not exhibit any striking or distinctive visual patterns; however, the presence of existing agricultural uses on the left and at the horizon soften the view and provide some aesthetic resources mostly unobstructed in the view. The existing electrical utility line and poles constitute encroaching man-made elements within this KV (Appendix B of this EIR).

Figure 3.2-1. Key View Map

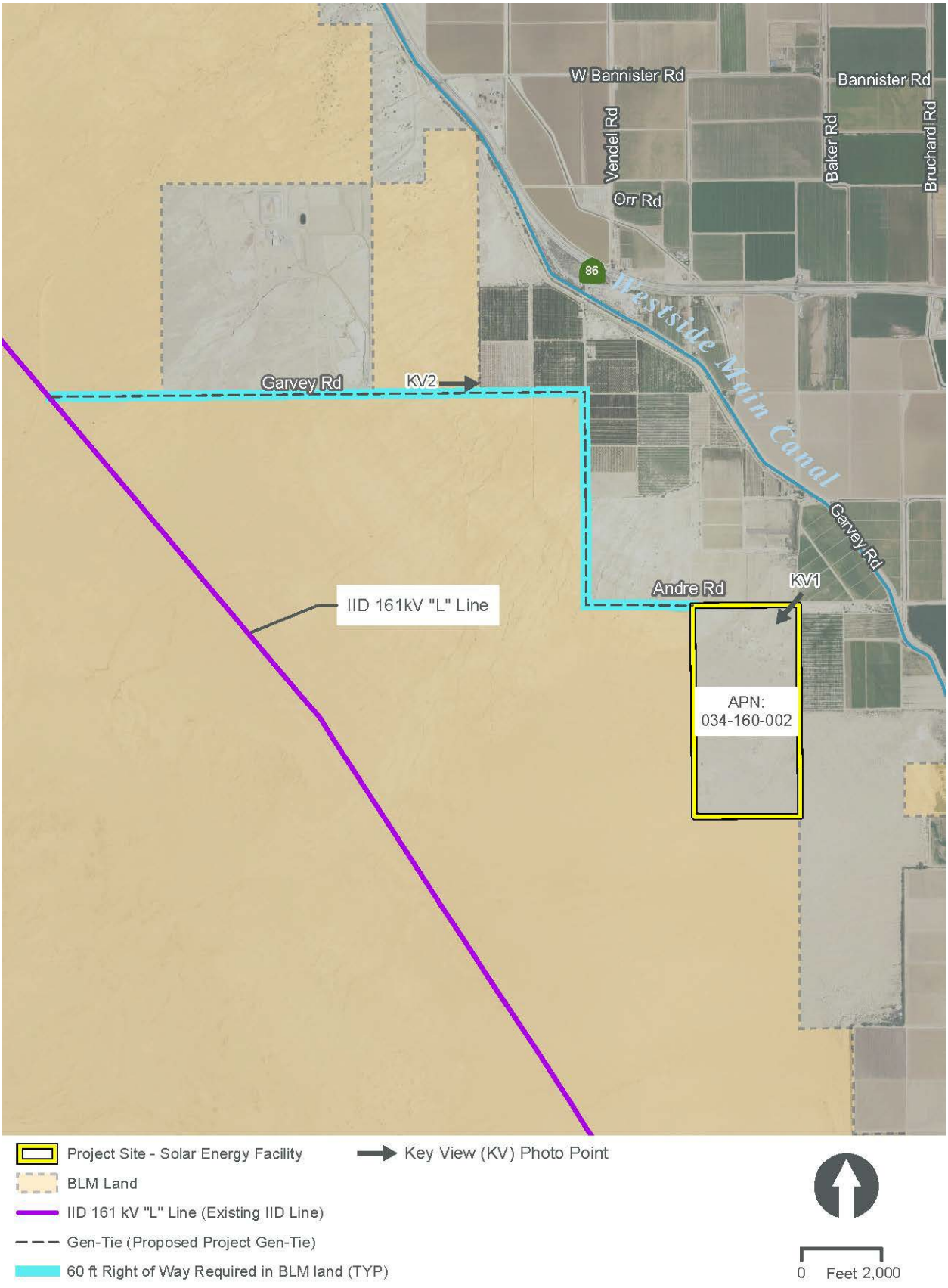

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Figure 3.2-2. Key View 1: View from Andre Road, Looking Southwest from Northeast Corner of VEGA 6 Project Site

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Figure 3.2-3. Key View 2: View from Garvey Road, Looking East

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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. The expansion area is located approximately 1.5 miles north of the Interstate-10 Freeway (I-10) and east of the unincorporated community of Thousand Palms in Riverside County. The existing Ramon Substation occupies approximately 6.7 acres on the single parcel (APN 651-230-015). The community of Thousand Palms is characterized by mobile home subdivisions, single-family residential neighborhoods, and rural residential development (County of Riverside 2021).

Views in the immediate vicinity are characterized by utility infrastructure and overhead lines from the existing Ramon Substation and residential development. Looking to the north and east, there is vacant and undisturbed land, with residences located further east. The existing Ramon Substation is located immediately south of the Ramon Substation expansion area. To the west, there is existing utility infrastructure (SCE Mirage Substation) and residential development with the nearest single-family residence located approximately 0.2 miles from the proposed expansion area. Viewers would be limited to drivers on Ramon Road and residences in the immediate vicinity such as along Via Las Palmas and in the Tri Palm Estates development along Ramon Road to the southwest.

Scenic Vista

VEGA 6

Scenic vistas are typically expansive views from elevated areas. They may or may not be part of a designated scenic overlook or other area providing a static vista view of a landscape. The solar energy facility site is located in a rural portion of Imperial County and is not located within an area containing a scenic vista designated by the State or the County's General Plan.

The proposed gen-tie transmission line would be located entirely on federal lands managed by the BLM. According to the Conservation and Open Space Element of the Imperial County General Plan (County of Imperial 2016):

> Many of the natural scenic resources are located on land under BLM jurisdiction. County areas for BLM-managed lands are shown on Figure 9 and depict the values of the County's visual resources based on their Visual Resource Inventory (VRI) process. Areas with a moderate to high value for maintenance of visual quality could represent opportunities for conservation and open space areas.

According to Figure 9 of the Conservation and Open Space Element, the gen-tie line is located within an area with a high value for maintenance of visual quality (County of Imperial 2016).

Ramon Substation Expansion

The Ramon Substation expansion area is not located near or adjacent to any scenic vistas designated by the Western Coachella Valley Area Plan (WCVAP) (County of Riverside 2021).

Scenic Highways

VEGA 6

According to the Conservation and Open Space Element, no State scenic highways have been designated in Imperial County (County of Imperial 2016). Additionally, there are no designated

Caltrans scenic highways in the vicinity of the VEGA 6 project. The nearest scenic highway to the project site is the junction of SR-78 and SR-86, located over 10 miles northwest of the site. This section of the scenic highway would not be visible from the location of the proposed project.

Ramon Substation Expansion

There are no state designated Caltrans scenic highways in the vicinity of the Ramon Substation expansion area. The nearest scenic highway to the project site is located over 9 miles south of the site at the junction of SR111 and SR-74. There are also no County designated scenic highways along the Ramon Substation expansion area according to the WCVAP (County of Riverside 2021). The County of Riverside's General Plan's Circulation Element identifies the I-10 as a County eligible scenic highway (County of Riverside 2020). The I-10 is located approximately 1.5 miles south of the Ramon Substation expansion area.

Light, Glare, and Glint

VEGA 6

Glare is considered a continuous source of brightness, relative to diffused light, whereas glint is a direct redirection of the sun beam in the surface of a PV solar module. Glint is highly directional, since its origin is purely reflective, whereas glare is the reflection of diffuse irradiance; it is not a direct reflection of the sun.

As the project is located in an area consisting of mostly vacant land and the nature of the existing agricultural land and very few residences in the area, limited light is generated within the project area. The majority of the light and glare in the project area is a result of motor vehicles traveling on surrounding roadways, airplanes, and farm equipment. Local roadways generate glare both during the night hours when cars travel with lights on, and during daytime hours because of the sun's reflection from cars and pavement surfaces. When light is not sufficiently screened and spills over into areas outside of a particular development area the effect is called "light trespassing."

Ramon Substation Expansion

The Ramon Substation expansion area is located in an area with limited lighting because it is surrounded by undeveloped land to the north and east. The majority of the light and glare in the Ramon Substation area is from motor vehicles travelling along Ramon Road.

3.2.2 Regulatory Setting

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

State

California Department of Transportation

Caltrans manages the California Scenic Highway Program. The goal of the program is to preserve and protect scenic highway corridors from changes that would affect the aesthetic value of the land adjacent to the scenic corridor.

Local

Imperial County General Plan

The Imperial County General Plan contains policies for the protection and conservation of scenic resources and open spaces within the County. These policies also provide guidance for the design of new development. The Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan provides specific goals and objectives for maintaining and protecting the aesthetic character of the region. Table 3.2-1 provides an analysis of the proposed VEGA 6 project's consistency with the Conservation and Open Space Element Goal 5. Additionally, the Circulation and Scenic Highways Element of the General Plan provides policies for protecting and enhancing scenic resources within highway corridors in Imperial County, consistent with the Caltrans State Scenic Highway Program.

Table 3.2-1. Consistency with Applicable General Plan Conservation and Open Space Policies

General Plan Policies	Consistency with General Plan	Analysis
Goal 5: The aesthetic character of the region shall be protected and enhanced to provide a pleasing environment for residential, commercial, recreational, and tourist activity.	Consistent	The project would result in changes to the visual character of the project area. As described in Section 3.2.1, the project site does not contain high levels of visual character or quality; therefore, the project would not result in a significant deterioration in the visual character of the project site or project area.
Objective 5.1: Encourage the conservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of the desert and mountain landscape.	Consistent	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 CDCA planning area. Existing electrical utility lines and poles already exist along Garvey Road. The addition of new electrical lines and poles associated with the proposed gen-tie line would be absorbed into the broader landscape that already includes electricity transmission and utility lines.

Source: County of Imperial 2016

Office of Imperial Land Use Ordinance, Title 9

The County's Land Use Ordinance Code provides specific direction for lighting requirements.

DIVISION 17: RENEWABLE ENERGY RESOURCES, SECTION 91702.00 – SPECIFIC STANDARDS FOR ALL RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS

(R) Lights should be directed or shielded to confine direct rays to the project site and muted to the maximum extent consistent with safety and operational necessity.

Riverside County General Plan

The Riverside County General Plan does not have any specific sections related to aesthetics and visual resources. However, the Land Use Element includes policies related to Land Use Compatibility, Community Design, and Scenic Corridors, which have applicability to the topic of aesthetics. The Land Use Element provides direction related to how future development is intended to build out, such as the intensity/density and character of new development. The Land Use Element also addresses the relationship between development, community enhancement, and natural resource management. The Multipurpose Open Space Element also addresses open space and scenic resources in Riverside County.

Western Coachella Valley Area Plan

The WCVAP is one of 19 area plans within the County of Riverside General Plan. The WCVAP contains focused policies that guide the physical development and land uses in the unincorporated western portion of the Coachella Valley.

Riverside County Municipal Code

Chapter 8.80 of the Riverside County Municipal Code provides regulations for light pollution. This ordinance is intended to restrict the use of certain light fixtures emitting undesirable light rays into the night sky, which is a waste of natural resources and light trespass. The ordinance requires that outdoor luminaries be adequately shielded and directed such that no direct light falls outside the parcel of origin or onto the public right-of-way.

Riverside County Ordinance No. 348, Land Use

Riverside County's Land Use Ordinance establishes allowable uses of land and sets standards for what and how land may be developed. The ordinance protects the people and property of Riverside County from development of unsuitable land uses and aims to ensure that built areas are developed safely and with minimal conflict with surrounding lands.

Riverside County Ordinance No. 655, Regulating Light Pollution

The intent of Ordinance No. 655 is to restrict the permitted use of certain light fixtures emitting into the night sky undesirable light rays, which have a detrimental effect on astronomical observation and research. Ordinance No. 655 defines lighting sources, establishes the type and manner of installation and operation of lighting and details lighting prohibitions. Ordinance No. 655 sets forth requirements for lamp source and shielding of light emissions for outdoor fixtures to reduce "skyglow" or light pollution that affects day or nighttime views from the Mount Palomar Observatory.

As shown on Figure 6: Mount Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area of the WCVAP, the Ramon Substation expansion area is located within the limits of "Zone B" of the Mount Palomar Observatory Lighting Policy Area (County of Riverside 2021). As such, the expansion area is subject to the outdoor lighting policies and requirements specified by Riverside County Ordinance No. 655, which includes specific standards for lighting fixtures installed along public roadways and in other common areas and applies to all new development. Ordinance No. 655 encourages the use of low-pressure sodium lamps where possible, requires the shielding of all nonexempt outdoor lighting fixtures, specifies the hours of operation for nonexempt outdoor lighting fixtures, and regulates lighting fixtures used to illuminate outdoor advertising displays.

Riverside County Ordinance No. 915, Regulating Outdoor Lighting

The intent of this ordinance is to establish a countywide standard for outdoor lighting that would generally prohibit light trespass and protect the health, property, and well-being of residents within the unincorporated Riverside County.

3.2.3 Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section presents the significance criteria used for considering project impacts related to aesthetic and visual resources, 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 aesthetics are considered significant if any of the following occur:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway
- In non-urbanized areas, substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area

Methodology

VEGA 6

The visual impact analysis is based on field observations conducted in July 2021, as well as review of maps and aerial photographs for the VEGA 6 project area. A representative subset of photographed viewpoints was selected as KVs, which collectively serve as the basis for this assessment. Assessments of existing visual conditions were made based on professional judgment that took into consideration sensitive receptors and sensitive viewing areas in the VEGA 6 project area. The locations of the two KVs in relation to the project site are presented in Figure 3.2-1.

The following steps were taken in analyzing visual impacts of the VEGA 6 project:

1. Describe the existing visual setting, including any sensitive viewer groups (i.e., baseline conditions);
2. Identify key viewpoints for visual assessment;
3. Describe or depict the visual appearance of the project at the key viewpoints. Key viewpoints are selected to represent the typical views from the public right-of-way;
4. Assess the visual changes that would be introduced by the project and the viewer response based on defined attributes which are neither good nor bad. Change in visual character cannot be described as having good or bad attributes until compared with viewer responses to the change;

5. Determine the degree of visual impact;
6. Proposed methods to minimize adverse impacts

Ramon Substation Expansion

The visual impact analysis is based on a review of maps and aerial photographs for the Ramon Substation expansion area. The analysis includes a description of baseline conditions and analyzes the changes in visual quality that would occur with implementation of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion.

Impact Analysis

Impact 3.2-1 Would the project have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista?

VEGA 6

Scenic vistas are typically expansive views from elevated areas that may or may not be part of a designated scenic overlook or other area providing a static view of a landscape. During construction, the use of standard construction equipment including, but not limited to, trucks, cranes, and tractors would be required. The presence of this equipment within the VEGA 6 project site during construction would alter views of the area from undeveloped land to a construction site. However, the views of construction activity from the surrounding vicinity would be temporary and would not involve any designated scenic vistas as there are no designated scenic vistas in the project vicinity. According to the Imperial County General Plan, the closest scenic resource is the Salton Sea approximately 11 miles northwest of the project site (County of Imperial 2016). Therefore, impacts to a scenic vista are considered less than significant during construction.

Upon project operation, and with implementation of the solar infrastructure, the overall visual character of the VEGA 6 project site would change. However, given that there are no scenic resources or vistas within proximity to the VEGA 6 project site, project operation would not have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista. Impacts are considered less than significant.

Ramon Substation Expansion

The Ramon Substation expansion area is not located near or adjacent to any scenic vistas designated by the WCVAP (County of Riverside 2021). During construction, the use of standard construction equipment including, but not limited to, trucks, cranes, and tractors would be required. The presence of this equipment within the Ramon Substation expansion area during construction would alter views of the area from undeveloped land to a construction site. However, the views of construction activity from the surrounding vicinity would be temporary and would not involve any designated scenic vistas as there are no designated scenic vistas in the project vicinity. Therefore, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would have no impact on scenic vistas.

Mitigation Measure(s)

VEGA 6

No mitigation measures are required.

Ramon Substation Expansion

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-2 Would the project substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

VEGA 6

There are no designated or eligible state scenic highways in the VEGA 6 project vicinity. The nearest road segment among those identified by Imperial County is the junction of SR-78 and SR-86 which is located over 10 miles northwest of the VEGA 6 project site. Therefore, no impacts to scenic resources within any state scenic highways would occur.

Ramon Substation Expansion

As previously noted, there are no state designated Caltrans scenic highways in the vicinity of the Ramon Substation expansion area. The nearest scenic highway to the project site is located over 9 miles south of the site at the junction of SR-111 and SR-74. I-10, located approximately 1.5 miles south of the Ramon Substation expansion area, is considered a County eligible scenic highway. Due to these distances, no impacts to scenic resources within a state or county scenic highway would occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

VEGA 6

No mitigation measures are required.

Ramon Substation Expansion

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-3 In non-urbanized areas, would the project substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of public views of the site and its surroundings? (Public views are those that are experienced from publicly accessible vantage points). If the project is in an urbanized area, would the project conflict with applicable zoning and other regulations governing scenic quality?

VEGA 6

Short-term visual impacts would occur in association with construction activities, including introducing heavy equipment (e.g., cranes), staging and materials storage areas and potential dust and exhaust to the VEGA 6 project area. While construction equipment and activity may present a visual nuisance, it would be temporary (approximately 12-18 months) and would not represent a permanent change in views. Therefore, impacts associated with degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the VEGA 6 project site during construction are considered less than significant.

A discussion of the potential impacts of the project at KV1 and KV2 are discussed below:

KV 1 – View from Andre Road. From KV 1, the overall character and experience for viewers would change substantially with project implementation. The main physical change that would occur within this view is the complete removal of vegetation and grading of the solar energy facility site to accommodate the construction of solar apparatus and security fencing. Other facilities proposed such as roads, pads, underground utilities, and stormwater facilities would not be visible from the public right-of-way. There are no County-designated scenic resources visible from KV 1. Additionally, there

are no scenic vista points identified in the County General Plan and none of the roadways in the project vicinity are designated as scenic highways or roadways.

The proposed PV module frames when installed on pads would be approximately 7.5 feet in height and the proposed security fencing would be approximately 6 feet in height. Currently, the existing vegetation on the solar energy facility site consists of low-lying shrubs and there are no visual obstructions. The installation of the new PV module frames would not result in the obstruction of any scenic resources as none exist within this view (Appendix B of this EIR).

Well construction would necessitate the installation of a small pump structure to house well equipment and associated piping. The proposed pump structure would be small in comparison to the site as a whole and not readily visible from the public right-of-way. The pump structure would not result in the obstruction of any scenic resources as none exist within this view.

Project implementation would change the natural conditions of the site with development of a solar energy and battery storage facility. Onsite vegetation would be completely removed, and the site would be graded to accommodate the installation of PV module frames in arrays. Although project implementation would result in the conversion of a naturally vegetated area with energy-related facilities, open space vegetated areas are not considered to be scenic resources by the County of Imperial.

KV 2 – View from Garvey Road. From KV 2, the overall character and experience for the viewer would not change substantially with implementation of the project. The main physical change that would occur within this view would be the addition of new electrical lines and poles associated with the proposed gen-tie line. As shown in Figure 3.2-3, existing electrical utility lines and poles already exist along Garvey Road. The addition of new electrical lines and poles associated with the proposed gen-tie line would be absorbed into the broader landscape that already includes electricity transmission and utility lines. No substantial visual impacts with the installation of proposed electrical facilities associated with the gen-tie line would occur at KV 2. These effects would be less than significant.

Ramon Substation Expansion

Short-term visual impacts would occur in association with construction activities, including introducing heavy equipment (e.g., cranes), staging and materials storage areas and potential dust and exhaust to the expansion area. While construction equipment and activity may present a visual nuisance, it would be temporary (approximately 6 months) and would not represent a permanent change in views. Therefore, impacts associated with degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the Ramon Substation expansion area during construction are considered less than significant.

The Ramon Substation expansion would contribute to an increase in industrial character with the addition of utility infrastructure. This would also increase visual contrast to a predominantly natural-appearing landscape that surrounds the area. However, because the Ramon Substation and SCE Mirage Substation already exist, the overall character and experience of viewers would not substantially change or cause visual degradation of the site as a result of the proposed expansion. The Ramon Substation expansion would not result in the obstruction of any scenic resources as none exist within the vicinity of the area. Therefore, impacts related to the degradation of the existing visual character or quality of the Ramon Substation expansion area would be considered less than significant.

Mitigation Measure(s)

VEGA 6

No mitigation measures are required.

Ramon Substation Expansion

No mitigation measures are required.

Impact 3.2-4 Would the project create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

VEGA 6

Minimal lighting would be required for operations and would be limited to safety and security functions. All lighting will be directed downward and shielded to focus illumination on the desired areas only and to minimize light trespass in accordance with applicable County requirements. If additional lighting should be required for nighttime maintenance, portable lighting equipment would be used. The VEGA 6 project is not anticipated to create a new source of substantial light which would adversely affect nighttime views in the project area, and this is considered a less than significant impact.

The VEGA 6 project would involve the installation of PV solar arrays which have low reflectivity. Solar PV modules are specifically designed to reduce reflection as any reflected light cannot be converted into energy. Research has shown that reflectivity from PV panels is similar to reflections from water (Appendix B of this EIR). Therefore, the PV panels would not create a significant source of glare during sunlight hours. The VEGA 6 project would not use other reflective materials such a fiberglass, aluminum or vinyl/plastic siding, galvanized products, and brightly painted steel roofs that have the potential to create on- and off-site glare. The proposed VEGA 6 project would result in a less than significant impact related to glare.

Shade and shadow effects would be introduced within the VEGA 6 project site due to the placement of PV modules in arrays. However, due to the height of the proposed apparatus at 7.5 feet and the perimeter fencing at 6 feet, the effects of shade and shadow would not encroach into areas offsite for extended periods of time that would result in significant shade and/or shadow impacts.

Ramon Substation Expansion

Minimal lighting would be required for operations and would be limited to safety and security functions. The Ramon Substation expansion area is located within the limits of “Zone B” of the Mount Palomar Observatory Lighting Policy Area (County of Riverside 2021). All projects within Zone B of the Mt. Palomar Nighttime Lighting Policy Area are required to adhere to the requirements of Riverside County Ordinance No. 655, which controls artificial lighting sources to protect the Observatory. Ordinance No. 655 states that low-pressure sodium lamps are the preferred illuminating source, and that outdoor lighting fixtures are required to be shielded. Pursuant to Section 7 of Ordinance No. 655, future building permits would be required to include specific information with regard to lighting, as follows: 1) the location of the site where outdoor light fixtures would be installed; 2) plans indicating the location and type of fixtures of the premises; and 3) a description of the outdoor light fixtures, including, but not limited to, manufacturer’s catalog cuts and drawings. The required plans and descriptions enable the County of Riverside to determine whether compliance with the requirements of the ordinance are met. No building permits would be issued by the County of Riverside unless the building permit applications demonstrate consistency with the provisions of Ordinance No. 655.

Based on the foregoing analysis, and with mandatory compliance with Ordinance No. 655, a less than significant impact would occur.

Mitigation Measure(s)

VEGA 6

No mitigation measures are required.

Ramon Substation Expansion

No mitigation measures are required.

3.2.4 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 proposed project, the proposed project will be decommissioned and dismantled. No grading or significant landform modifications would be required during decommissioning activities upon site restoration in the future. Although the project site would be visually disrupted in the short-term during decommissioning activities because extensive grading is not required and these activities would be temporary, the visual character of the project site would not be substantially degraded in the short-term and related impacts would be less than significant.

Residual

Impacts related to glare and glint impacts to roadway travelers would be less than significant and no additional mitigation measures are required. Changes to visual character of the project area would be less than significant and would be transitioned back to their prior conditions following site decommissioning. Based on these conclusions, implementation of the proposed project would not result in residual significant unmitigable impacts to the visual character of the project site or add substantial amounts of light and glare.