6 Effects Found Not Significant

In accordance with Section 15128 of the CEQA Guidelines, an EIR must contain a statement briefly indicating the reasons that various potential significant effects of a project were determined not to be significant.

6.1 Agriculture and Forestry Resources

6.1.1 VEGA 6

Agriculture Resources

According to the farmland maps prepared by the California Department of Conservation, no portion of the solar energy facility site is designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (DOC 2021). The proposed gen-tie line would border land designated as Farmland of Local Importance; however, the gen-tie line would be located entirely on undeveloped BLM desert land. Therefore, implementation of the proposed project would not convert Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland to non-agriculture use.

The solar energy facility site is currently zoned Open Space/Preservation (S-2). According to the 2016/2017 Imperial County Williamson Act Map produced by the California Department of Conservation's Division of Land Resource Protection (DOC 2016), the project site is not located on Williamson Act contracted land. The proposed project would not conflict with existing zoning for agriculture use or a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, no impact would occur.

Forestry Resources

No portion of the VEGA 6 project site or the immediate vicinity is zoned or designated as forest lands, timberlands, or for timberland production. As such, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not conflict with existing zoning or cause the need for a zone change specifically related to agriculture or forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g)). Therefore, implementation of the proposed VEGA 6 project would not impact forestry resources.

6.1.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

Agriculture Resources

According to the farmland maps prepared by the California Department of Conservation, no portion of the Ramon Substation expansion area is designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (DOC 2020). The expansion area is designated as Other Land. Implementation of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not convert Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, or Unique Farmland to non-agriculture use. Therefore, no impact would occur.

The Ramon Substation expansion area is zoned General Residential Zone (R-3). The Ramon expansion area is not within an agricultural preserve, nor is it subject to a Williamson Act contract.

Under existing conditions, the expansion area is vacant and undeveloped. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not conflict with existing zoning for agriculture use or a Williamson Act contract. Therefore, no impact would occur.

Forestry Resources

No portion of the Ramon Substation expansion area or the immediate vicinity is zoned or designated as forest lands, timberlands, or for timberland production. As such, the proposed expansion would not conflict with existing zoning or cause the need for a zone change specifically related to agriculture or forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code Section 12220(g), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code Section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g)). Therefore, implementation of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not impact forestry resources.

6.2 Energy

6.2.1 VEGA 6

Information for this section is summarized from the *Energy Consumption Assessment for the VEGA SES 6 Solar and Battery Storage Project* prepared for the project by ECORP Consulting, Inc. This report is included in Appendix L of this EIR.

The proposed VEGA 6 project would impact energy resources during project construction and operation. The analysis focuses on the four sources of energy that are most relevant to the project: the equipment fuel necessary for construction, the electricity and natural gas necessary during operations, and the automotive fuel necessary for ongoing maintenance activities during operations.

The following discussion calculates the potential energy consumption associated with construction and operation of the proposed VEGA 6 project and analyzes if the energy utilized would be wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary consumption of energy resources.

Construction

Fuel necessary for project construction would be required for the operation and maintenance of construction equipment and the transportation of materials to the project site. The fuel expenditure necessary to construct the solar facility and infrastructure would be temporary, lasting only as long as project construction. As indicated in Table 6-1, the VEGA 6 project's gasoline fuel consumption during the one-time construction period is estimated to be 43,251 gallons during the first year of construction and 34,581 gallons during the second year of construction. This would increase the annual countywide gasoline fuel use associated with offroad equipment in the County by 0.020 percent and 0.016 percent, respectively. As such, project construction would have a nominal effect on local and regional energy supplies. No unusual project characteristics would necessitate the use of construction equipment that would be less energy efficient than at comparable construction sites in the region or the state. Construction contractors would purchase their own gasoline and diesel fuel from local suppliers and would judiciously use fuel supplies to minimize costs due to waste and subsequently maximize profits. Additionally, construction equipment fleet turnover and increasingly stringent state and federal regulations on engine efficiency combined with state regulations limiting engine idling times and requiring recycling of construction debris, would further reduce the amount of transportation fuel demand during project construction. For these reasons, it is expected that construction fuel consumption associated with the VEGA 6 project would not be any more inefficient, wasteful, or

unnecessary than other similar development projects of this nature. The VEGA 6 project's energy impacts during construction would be less than significant.

Table 6-1. VEGA 6 Project Energy and Fuel Consumption

Energy Type	Annual Energy Consumption	Percentage Increase Countywide
Facility Electrical and Natural Gas Consumption		
Electricity Consumption	3,470,860 kilowatt-hours	0.41 percent
Natural Gas	45 therms	0.0001 percent
Automotive Fuel Consumption		
Year One of Construction	43,251 gallons	0.020 percent
Year Two of Construction	34,581 gallons	0.016 percent
Project Operations	2,785 gallons	0.001 percent

Source: Appendix L of this EIR

Operations

Once construction is completed the VEGA 6 project would be remotely controlled. No employees would be based at the VEGA 6 project site. The only operational emissions associated with the VEGA 6 project would be associated with motor vehicle use for routine maintenance work, water import, and site security as well as panel upkeep and cleaning. Six vehicle trips per day for routine maintenance work, site security, and trucking in water was assumed. This is a conservative estimate as most days would require no operational related vehicle trips. As indicated in Table 6-1, this would estimate to a consumption of approximately 2,785 gallons of automotive fuel per year, which would increase the annual countywide automotive fuel consumption by 0.001 percent.

As shown in Table 6-1, the annual electricity consumption due to operations would be 3,470,860 kilowatt hours, resulting in a negligible increase (0.41 percent) in the typical annual electricity consumption attributable to all non-residential uses in Imperial County. Table 6-1 shows that the annual natural gas consumption due to operations would be 45 therms, resulting an insignificant increase (0.0001 percent) in the typical annual natural gas consumption of nonresidential uses in Imperial County. The VEGA 6 project's energy impacts during operations would be less than significant.

Compliance with State and Local Plans for Renewable Energy or Energy Efficiency

The purpose of the proposed VEGA 6 project is the construction of a renewable energy and storage facility in Imperial County. Once in operation, it will decrease the need for energy from fossil fuel–based power plants in the State. The result would be a net increase in electricity resources available to the regional grid, generated from a renewable source. The proposed VEGA 6 project would help California meet its RPS of 60 percent of retail electricity sales from renewable sources by the end of 2030 and 100 percent by 2045. Additionally, the VEGA 6 project would also be consistent with the County's General Plan Conservation and Open Space Element, Objective 9.2 which encourages renewable energy developments. Therefore, the VEGA 6 project would directly support state and local plans for renewable energy development. The proposed VEGA 6 project would not conflict with or obstruct a state or local plan for renewable energy or energy efficiency; therefore, no impact would occur.

6.2.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

Construction activities associated with the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would require the consumption of fossil fuel resources, for example diesel fuel and gasoline to power the off-road construction equipment and construction vehicles. Additionally, construction would require the manufacture and delivery of new equipment and materials, which would require energy use. The energy used by the proposed Ramon Substation expansion during construction would not be wasteful, inefficient, or unnecessary in light of the new facilities that would increase capacity and system reliability.

Grading activities would be required to adhere to local, regional, and state standards as well as best management practices. Construction of any structures would be subject to the California Building Code/Title 24, which includes energy efficiency and green building standards that address energy consumption.

Operations, including inspection, patrol, and maintenance would also require use of fossil fuel resources. However, no new employees would be required, and maintenance would be incorporated to IID's existing maintenance programs. The operation and maintenance activities would not change from IID's existing activities.

The proposed expansion would allow IID to increase capacity and the efficiency of the system's ability to deliver electricity to California's end users. Therefore, the proposed expansion would not conflict with any state or local plan for prioritizing renewable energy or energy efficiency.

6.3 Mineral Resources

6.3.1 VEGA 6

The VEGA 6 project site is not used for mineral resource production and the applicant is not proposing any form of mineral extraction. According to Figure 8: Imperial County Existing Mineral Resources of the Conservation and Open Space Element of the General Plan (County of Imperial 2016), no known mineral resources occur within the VEGA 6 project site nor does the project site contain mapped mineral resources. Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not result in the loss of availability of any known mineral resources that would be of value to the region and the residents of California nor would the proposed VEGA 6 project result in the loss of availability of a locally important mineral resource.

Based on a review of the California Department Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources Well Finder, there are no geothermal wells located within the VEGA 6 project site (California Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources 2022). However, there are several geothermal wells located north, northeast, and east of the project site that are plugged and abandoned (California Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources 2022). The proposed VEGA 6 project would be designed to avoid the geothermal wells and would result in no impacts.

6.3.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

The Ramon Substation expansion area is located in a region identified as Mineral Resource Zone-3 (MRZ-3) as shown in Figure OS-6 of the Riverside County's General Plan (County of Riverside 2015). Areas identified as MRZ-3 are areas where the available geologic information indicates that mineral deposits are likely to exist; however, the significance of the deposit is undetermined. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion is not located within an area known to be underlain by regionally or

locally important mineral resources or within an area that has the potential to be underlain by regionally or locally important mineral resources, as disclosed by the Riverside County General Plan. Accordingly, implementation of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region or the residents of the State of California.

Based on a review of the California Department Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources Well Finder, there are no geothermal wells located within the Ramon Substation expansion area (California Department of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources 2023). Accordingly, impacts to the environmental issue of Mineral Resources would not occur.

6.4 Population and Housing

6.4.1 VEGA 6

Development of housing is not proposed as part of the VEGA 6 project. The unemployment rate in Imperial County as of September 2023 was 21.1 percent (State of California Employment Development Department 2023a). The applicant expects to utilize construction workers from the local and regional area, a workforce similar to that involved in the development of other utility-scale solar facilities. Based on the unemployment rate in Imperial County (21.1 percent) (State of California Employment Development Department 2023a), and the availability of the local workforce, construction of the proposed VEGA 6 project would not have a growth-inducing effect.

The proposed VEGA 6 project would be operated on an unstaffed basis and be monitored remotely, with periodic on-site personnel visitations for security, maintenance and system monitoring. Therefore, no full-time site personnel would be required on-site during operations and approximately two to three employees would only be onsite up to two times per year to wash the solar panels. As the project's PV arrays produce electricity passively, maintenance requirements are anticipated to be very minimal. Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not result in a substantial growth in the area, as the number of employees required to operate and maintain the facility is minimal.

No housing exists within the VEGA 6 project site and no people reside within the project site. Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not displace substantial numbers of people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. The proposed VEGA 6 project would result in no impact to population and housing.

6.4.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

Development of housing is not proposed as part of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion. The unemployment rate in the Riverside-San Bernardino-Ontario Metropolitan Statistical Area (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) as of September 2023 was 5.0 percent (State of California Employment Development Department 2023b). IID expects to utilize construction workers from the local and regional area, a workforce similar to that involved in the development of other utility-scale facilities. Based on the unemployment rate in Riverside County (5.0 percent) (State of California Employment Development Department 2023b), and the availability of the local workforce, construction of the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not have a growth-inducing effect.

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require any long-term employees during operations. There are already existing employees staffed at the existing Ramon Substation. These existing employees are anticipated to perform routine maintenance work and site security for the

expected. The proposed VEGA 6 project is not expected to have an impact on parks, libraries, and other public facilities.

6.6.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

Schools

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion does not include the development of residential land uses that would result in an increase in population or student generation. The proposed VEGA 6 project would have no impact on Riverside County schools.

Parks and Other Public Facilities

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not generate new employment on a long-term basis. There are already existing employees staffed at the existing Ramon Substation. These existing employees are anticipated to perform routine maintenance work and site security for the proposed expansion area. Therefore, substantial permanent increases in population that would adversely affect local parks, libraries, and other public facilities are not expected. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion is not expected to have an impact on parks, libraries, and other public facilities.

6.7 Utilities and Service Systems

6.7.1 VEGA 6

Wastewater Facilities

The VEGA 6 project would generate a minimal volume of wastewater during construction. During construction activities, wastewater would be contained within portable toilet facilities and disposed of at an approved site. No habitable structures are proposed on the VEGA 6 project site, therefore, there would be no wastewater generation from the proposed VEGA 6 project. The proposed VEGA 6 project would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded wastewater facilities.

Storm Water Facilities

The VEGA 6 project does not require expanded or new storm drainage facilities off-site (i.e., outside of the project footprint) because the proposed solar facility would not generate a significant increase in the amount of impervious surfaces that would increase runoff during storm events. Therefore, the VEGA 6 project would not require the construction of off-site storm water management facilities. Water from solar panel washing would continue to percolate through the ground, as the majority of the surfaces within the project site boundary would remain pervious. As such, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded storm water facilities beyond those proposed as part of the VEGA 6 project and evaluated in the EIR.

Water Facilities

The proposed VEGA 6 project is not anticipated to result in a significant increase in water demand/use during operation; however, water will be needed for solar panel washing and dust suppression. During operation, water would be trucked to the VEGA 6 project site from a local water source. Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water facilities.

proposed expansion area. Therefore, the proposed expansion would not result in a substantial growth in the area.

No housing exists within the Ramon Substation expansion area and no people reside within the expansion area. Therefore, the proposed expansion would not displace substantial numbers of people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would result in no impact to population and housing.

6.5 Recreation

6.5.1 VEGA 6

The VEGA 6 project site is not used for formal recreational purposes. Also, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not generate new employment on a long-term basis. As such, the VEGA 6 project would not significantly increase the use or accelerate the deterioration of regional parks or other recreational facilities. The temporary increase of population during construction that might be caused by an influx of workers would be minimal and not cause a detectable increase in the use of parks. Additionally, the proposed VEGA 6 project does not include or require the expansion of recreational facilities. Therefore, no impact is identified for recreation.

6.5.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

The Ramon Substation expansion area is not used for formal recreational purposes. Also, as described above, the proposed expansion would not generate new employment on a long-term basis. As such, the proposed expansion would not significantly increase the use or accelerate the deterioration of regional parks or other recreational facilities. The temporary increase of population during construction that might be caused by an influx of workers would be minimal and not cause a detectable increase in the use of parks. Additionally, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion does not include or require the expansion of recreational facilities. Therefore, no impact is identified for recreation.

6.6 Public Services

6.6.1 VEGA 6

Schools

The proposed VEGA 6 project does not include the development of residential land uses that would result in an increase in population or student generation. Construction of the proposed VEGA 6 project would not result in an increase in student population within the Imperial County's School District since it is anticipated that construction workers would commute in during construction operations. The proposed VEGA 6 project would have no impact on Imperial County schools.

Parks and Other Public Facilities

No full-time employees are required to operate the VEGA 6 project. The project facility will be monitored remotely. It is anticipated that maintenance of the facility will require minimal site presence to perform periodic visual inspections and minor repairs. Therefore, substantial permanent increases in population that would adversely affect local parks, libraries, and other public facilities are not

Power, Natural Gas, and Telecommunication Facilities

The proposed VEGA 6 project would involve construction of power facilities. However, these are components of the project as evaluated in the EIR. The proposed VEGA 6 project would not otherwise generate the demand for or require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities that would in turn, result in a significant impact to the environment.

Solid Waste Facilities

Solid waste generation would be minor for the construction and operation of the VEGA 6 project. Solid waste would be disposed of using a locally-licensed waste hauling service, most likely Allied Waste. Trash would likely be hauled to the Imperial Landfill (13-AA-0019) located approximately 14 miles southeast of the proposed VEGA 6 project in Imperial. The Imperial Landfill has approximately 12,384,000 cubic yards of remaining capacity and is estimated to remain in operation through 2040 (CalRecycle 2022). Therefore, Imperial Landfill has adequate capacity to receive the minor amount of solid waste generated by construction and operation of the proposed VEGA 6 project.

Additionally, the VEGA 6 project would comply with applicable State and local requirements for waste reduction and recycling; including the 1989 California Integrated Waste Management Act and the 1991 California Solid Waste Reuse and Recycling Access Act of 1991. Further, conditions of the CUP would contain provisions for recycling and diversion of Imperial County construction waste policies.

When the proposed VEGA 6 project reaches the end of its operational life, the components would be decommissioned and deconstructed. When the project concludes operations, much of the wire, steel, and modules of which the system is comprised would be recycled to the extent feasible. The VEGA 6 project components would be deconstructed and recycled or disposed of safely, and the site could be converted to other uses in accordance with applicable land use regulations in effect at the time of closure. Commercially reasonable efforts would be used to recycle or reuse materials from the decommissioning. All other materials would be disposed of at a licensed facility. A less than significant impact is identified for this issue.

6.7.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

Wastewater Facilities

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would generate a minimal volume of wastewater during construction. During construction activities, wastewater would be contained within portable toilet facilities and disposed of at an approved site. No habitable structures are proposed, therefore, there would be no wastewater generation from the proposed expansion. The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded wastewater facilities.

Storm Water Facilities

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion does not require expanded or new storm drainage facilities off-site (i.e., outside of the project footprint) because the proposed facility would not generate a significant increase in the amount of impervious surfaces that would increase runoff during storm events. Therefore, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require the construction of off-site storm water management facilities. As such, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded storm water facilities.

Water Facilities

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion is not anticipated to result in a significant increase in water demand/use during operation; however, water will be needed for dust suppression. During operation, water would be trucked to the expansion area from a local water source. Therefore, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded water facilities.

Power, Natural Gas, and Telecommunication Facilities

The proposed Ramon Substation expansion would involve construction and expansion of existing power facilities. However, these are components of the project as evaluated in the EIR. The proposed expansion would not otherwise generate the demand for or require or result in the relocation or construction of new or expanded electric power, natural gas, or telecommunications facilities that would in turn, result in a significant impact to the environment.

Solid Waste Facilities

The Ramon Substation expansion area is within the jurisdiction of the Riverside County Waste Management Department, which operates six landfills and contracts with an additional private landfill, and administers several transfer station leases. The nearest landfill, and the one most likely to accept waste from the expansion area, is the Oasis Landfill. According to CalRecycle, the Oasis Landfill has 433,779 cubic yards of remaining capacity and is estimated to remain in operation through 2055 (CalRecycle 2023).

Construction of the Ramon Substation expansion would result in the generation of construction-related waste. Projects that have the potential to generate construction and demolition (C&D) waste are required to comply with the County of Riverside's C&D Waste Diversion Program. This program is designed to comply with AB 939 and the CALGreen Building Code, Materials Conservation and Resource Efficiency section. Compliance with the County of Riverside's C&D Waste Diversion Program would ensure that a minimum of 65 percent of the project's C&D waste would be recycled and diverted from landfills. It is anticipated that Oasis Landfill would have sufficient daily capacity to accept the construction waste generated by the proposed Ramon Substation expansion. The proposed expansion is not anticipated to cause or contribute to the need for new or expanded solid waste facilities during construction. The proposed expansion is not anticipated to generate solid waste during operations.

Based on the analysis above, the Oasis Landfill would have adequate capacity to handle solid waste generated by the proposed Ramon Substation expansion. Accordingly, impacts would be less than significant.

6.8 Wildfire

6.8.1 VEGA 6

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the VEGA 6 project site is not located within or near a state responsibility area or lands classified as very high severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2007). Therefore, the proposed VEGA 6 project would not substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan; expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a

wildfire; exacerbate fire risk; or, expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes. No impact is identified for wildfire.

6.8.2 Ramon Substation Expansion

According to the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, the Ramon Substation expansion area is not located within or near a state responsibility area or lands classified as very high severity zones (California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection 2007). According to the WCVAP Wildfire Susceptibility Map, the expansion area is not located within an area susceptible to wildfire (County of Riverside 2021). Therefore, the proposed Ramon Substation expansion would not substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan; expose project occupants to, pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire; exacerbate fire risk; or, expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes. No impact is identified for wildfire.