



City of Desert Hot Springs
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**Notice of Preparation of a
Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report for the
Desert Hot Springs Wind Energy Repowering Project**

Date: August 20, 2018
To: State Agencies, Responsible Agencies, Local and Public Agencies, and Interested Parties
From: City of Desert Hot Springs
Subject: Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (EIR)

Pursuant to Section 21166 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code 21000–21189) and Section 15163 of the CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Division 6, Chapter 3, Sections 15000– 15387), the City of Desert Hot Springs (City) will prepare a Draft Supplemental EIR (Draft SEIR) for the Desert Hot Springs Wind Energy Repowering Project (Project).

Project Overview

The Project involves the decommissioning of approximately 69 existing wind turbines, the construction and operation of up to four new wind turbines generally located within and adjacent to existing footprints of the current wind turbines, and the future decommissioning of the new wind turbines at the end of their useful life. The majority of the Project, including the construction and operation of the new wind turbines, would occur on privately owned lands located within jurisdictional boundaries of the City; ancillary components of the Project—specifically a segment of the existing access road and electrical interconnection—will traverse adjacent off-site land under the jurisdiction of the County of Riverside. In accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15367, the City is the Lead Agency with principal responsibility to consider the Project for approval.

Purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP)

The City is soliciting input regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the Draft SEIR, which is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Project. Your agency may need to use the Draft SEIR when considering permitting or other required approvals that you may issue for the Project.

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The project description, location, and environmental issues to be addressed in the Draft SEIR are described in the following paragraphs. Because of time limits mandated by state law, your scoping comments are requested at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after publication of this notice. Please send responses by email or regular mail to the City contact and address below. Please make sure to identify the name and phone number of a contact person at your agency or organization.

If you are interested in providing comments, please direct all correspondence to:

Benjamin Torres, Associate Planner
City of Desert Hot Springs
65950 Pierson Boulevard
Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240
E-mail: btorres@cityofdhs.org

Project Location

The approximately 160-acre Project site is bordered by undeveloped land to the north, south, and west, and Municipal Water District (MWD) facilities to the east. Downtown Desert Hot Springs is located approximately 6 miles east of the Project site, and the Interstate (I-) 10/State Route (SR-) 62 interchange is located approximately 2.2 miles to the south. Primary access to the Project site would continue to be provided via an existing private access off Windhaven Road. The Project site consists of the Assessor's Parcel Number (APN) 667-160-001 (**Figure 1**).

Project Background

In 1985, the County of Riverside approved the Wind Energy Conversion System (WECS) 20 Wind Park project on the same Project site, which was proposed by Energy Unlimited Inc. (EUI), for the development of 128 65-kilowatt (kW) wind turbines. At one time, the WECS 20 Wind Park facility included 73 wind turbines, although 4 of these turbines have since been decommissioned. The Project site, including the WECS 20 Wind Park facility, was annexed into the City in 1994.

The City received applications from EUI in 2000 to install eight new wind turbines within the existing WECS 20 Wind Park facility. The Conditional Use Permit and accompanying variances were approved by the City in January 2001. Construction of the eight turbines had not commenced by the time the permits expired 2 years after issuance. In 2003, EUI applied with the City to have the permits reapproved. In 2009, the City certified the Revised Commercial WECS 20 Permit Project Final EIR (WECS 20 FEIR) evaluating the potentially significant environmental impacts of the previously proposed eight-turbine project.

The potentially significant environmental impacts identified in the WECS 20 FEIR were determined to be less than significant or were reduced to a level considered less than significant through the adoption of mitigation measures that would avoid or substantially reduce impacts. No significant and unavoidable impacts were identified to occur in the WECS 20 FEIR.

As of this date, the project described and analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR has not been implemented.

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Project Description

The Project as now proposed would produce up to approximately 17 MW of wind energy and would consist of up to four new wind turbines with a range of approximately 2.0 MW to 4.2 MW in nameplate capacity per turbine. In addition to the new wind turbines, the Project includes the following primary components:

- Decommissioning of approximately 69 existing wind turbines and the appropriate ancillary equipment
- Connection to an existing substation (located on APN 516-030-014) through either a new underground or overhead collection line system (or combination, thereof) or a new connection to an existing overhead SCE 12-kilovolt collection line system
- Installation of one new temporary and one new permanent meteorological tower, each up to 309 feet tall
- Decommissioning of the new wind turbines at the end of their useful life

Proposed Wind Turbines

Since wind turbine technology is continually improving, and the cost and availability of specific types of turbines vary from year to year, representative turbines for the Project include up to four wind turbines ranging from 2.0 MW to 4.2 MW in nameplate capacity per turbine. Turbines would consist of tubular steel towers with an estimated rotor diameter of up to 384 feet and a total height (turbine base to top of turbine blade in the 12:00 position) of up to 493 feet.

All turbines would be three-bladed, upwind, horizontal-axis wind turbines. Each wind turbine would be mounted on a concrete pedestal supported by a permanent concrete foundation. Each wind turbine would have a turbine rotor and nacelle mounted on top of its tubular steel tower.

The turbines would be grouped in a single row and connected by an underground or overhead electrical cable system. Turbines would be arranged in the row in accordance with applicable industry siting recommendations for optimum energy production and minimal land disturbance.

Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition System

Each wind turbine would be connected to an off-site Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system. The SCADA system would allow for controlling and monitoring individual wind turbines, as well as the Project as a whole, from a central operations center. If problems occur, the SCADA system could send signals to a cell phone, tablet, computer, or other personal communication device to alert operations staff. The SCADA system would also be connected to the California Independent System Operator and SCE.

The Project would use wind turbines designed with several levels of built-in safety measures to comply with Occupational Safety and Health Administration and American National Standards Institute requirements. Personnel located at an off-site operations and maintenance (O&M) facility would monitor the wind turbines with the SCADA system.

Safety and Security

The wind turbines would be equipped with a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)–compliant lightning rod atop the nacelle. The anemometer, wind vane, other sensitive parts in the nacelle,

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and the controller are protected from noise or surge spikes due to lightning strike by an upgraded shielded protection system. Each of the blades would also have shielding to protect the blades from damage caused by lightning. The turbine-mounted protection would be tied to a bare copper grounding cable installed around the foundation for lightning and electrical protection.

The turbine system would be equipped with arc flash detection sensors, optical technology to detect the presence of the initial arc flash, over-current limiting devices, and either thermal circuit breakers or traditional fuses.

Installation of the wind turbines would be required to comply with FAA Advisory Circular 70/7460-1L Change 1, Obstruction Lighting/Marking, requirements. The Project Applicant will file Form 7460-1, Notification of Proposed Construction or Alteration, with the FAA prior to constructing the wind turbines. To ensure safety to both air traffic and O&M personnel on the ground, the FAA would determine the appropriate lighting required for the wind turbines and the appropriate exterior finish for the turbines and towers for daylight marking.

During the construction phase, access roads would have gates or signs installed for safety reasons, as necessary, to control public access to the Project site. Adaptive management based on results of resource-specific field surveys would be implemented to protect environmental resources to the extent feasible.

Meteorological Towers

The Project would include installation of one new permanent and one new temporary meteorological tower, each up to 309 feet tall. The permanent meteorological tower would consist of a free-standing, lattice structure that contains meteorological instruments such as anemometers to measure wind speed in order to maximize the operating efficiency of the Project. This tower would include FAA obstruction lighting.

The temporary meteorological tower would be temporarily installed at one of the four turbine sites prior to construction of the wind turbine. It would be used to obtain wind data for site calibration related to the power curve testing process for the wind turbines. Although this meteorological tower may require FAA obstruction lighting, it will only be installed for a short period of time and would be dismantled and removed prior to turbine erection.

Access Roads

Where feasible, the existing network of permanent access roads would be retained and reused for the new wind turbines. In addition to the existing roads, permanent access and maintenance roads would be constructed to provide access and circulation within the Project. These access roads will consist of approximately 16-foot-wide permanent roads to provide access to each wind turbine and ancillary equipment. These same permanent access roads would be used during construction, although the width of these roads may be temporarily increased to up to approximately 36 feet wide to accommodate cranes and larger construction equipment.

Access roads will consist of compacted native material but may also require approximately 4 to 6 inches of aggregate and/or geosynthetic material to provide the soil strength needed for construction. The disturbed areas outside the final roadway width would be graded and compacted for use during construction and then de-compacted and stabilized at the conclusion of construction. A new permanent access road layout will incorporate applicable federal and local standards

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regarding internal road design and circulation, particularly those provisions related to emergency vehicle access.

Temporary Laydown and Parking

An approximately 2-acre temporary laydown and staging area would be used for construction parking and as a temporary laydown yard to stage wind turbine components, construction equipment, and construction materials. Steel construction containers would be used to securely store specialized equipment. This area would be located strategically within the Project area to optimize construction activities while also minimizing off-site visual impacts to the extent feasible. After construction, all temporary disturbances and construction containers associated with the temporary laydown and parking area would be removed, and these areas would be restored.

Construction and Phasing

The Project Applicant has not yet finalized the construction schedule for the Project. However, it is tentatively anticipated that the Project construction would last approximately 13 months. Construction of the Project would consist of the following basic phases:

- Existing Turbine Decommissioning (first phase)
- Mobilization/Laydown
- Site Prep/Grading
- Collection Lines
- Access Roads
- Foundations Pouring/Curing
- New Turbine Install
- Existing Turbine Decommissioning (second phase)

The decommissioning stage of the Project consists of dismantling and removing the existing wind turbine generators (WTG), removing turbine access roads not required for the Project, and removing the existing overhead collection line and poles, if elected not to re-use them.

An approximately 200-foot by 300-foot temporary work area for each wind turbine site would be used for the crane pad, equipment laydown, and other construction-related needs. Within this temporary work area, a crane pad is required for supporting the large tower erection crane. The crane pad will consist of a compacted native soil or compacted aggregate base gravel area. The topsoil from the crane pads, if any, would be used at adjacent locations during restoration activities. Upon completion of construction, gravel with a minimum approximately 12-foot width would be placed around each approximately 18-foot-diameter reinforced concrete turbine pedestal to provide truck access. The balance of the cleared area would be revegetated.

To support the construction crane for turbine erection, a compacted-soil crane pad with a maximum slope of 1.0% is required. The construction crane pad will not have an asphalt surface, and underlying soils would be compacted to provide a soil-bearing capacity designed to provide a stable foundation for the crane. In locations where this is not feasible, a different type of crane mat would be used to stabilize the crane.

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The Project's complete electrical collector system would consist of a network of circuits that would collect and deliver electricity from each of the WTGs to an existing substation located outside the Project boundary to the south-southwest. The collector system typically includes three-phase conductor wires, fiber-optic cable, and a copper ground-conductor wire.

There is an existing overhead collection system within the Project boundary that is being used by the existing wind energy facility. The Project may either use all of this existing system to deliver electricity into the substation or use a portion of this system in conjunction with a new overhead or underground collector system (or combination, thereof). Alternatively, it could install an entirely new overhead or underground collector system (or combination, thereof). An approximately 24-foot-wide temporary disturbance would be required along the installation path for portions of the new collector system that may be installed below grade. This system would follow new and existing Project access roads to the extent possible in order to minimize the temporarily disturbed areas associated with the installation. The underground system would be placed within an approximately 48-inch-deep and, at a minimum, 12-inch-wide cable trench generally located along the length of the turbine access roads. Any topsoil would be stripped and set aside as trenching occurred, and then it would be replaced as the uppermost layer during backfill.

For portions of a new collector system that may be installed overhead and requiring new poles, new poles would be installed along its path every approximately 180 feet, depending on terrain and design requirements. Augers would be used to bore the holes that the poles would be placed into and backfilled and compacted as necessary.

Project Approvals

The following discretionary actions would be required to implement the Project. This list is preliminary, and may not be comprehensive:

- Conditional Use Permit (CUP No. 01-18)
- Variance (VAR No. 01-18)
- Regional Water Quality Control Board Section 401 water quality certification
- California Department Fish and Wildlife Streambed Alteration Agreement

Environmental Review

Potential Environmental Effects

Pursuant to Section 21166 of CEQA and Section 15163(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, the City may choose to prepare a supplement to an EIR rather than a subsequent EIR if: (1) Any of the conditions described in Section 15162 would require the preparation of a subsequent EIR, and (2) Only minor additions or changes would be necessary to make the previous EIR adequately apply to the project in the changed situation. In addition, pursuant to Section 15163(b), the supplement to the EIR need contain only the information necessary to make the previous EIR adequate for the project as revised. Thus, the City will focus the Draft SEIR's analysis on the potential of the Project to result in new or more severe environmental impacts compared with those impacts disclosed in the 2009 WECS 20 FEIR. As such, the City will address the following resource areas, as identified in the

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current version of the CEQA Guideline's Appendix G Environmental Checklist, in individual environmental impact analysis chapters within the Draft SEIR:

- Aesthetics
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural and Tribal Cultural Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Noise

The following are brief descriptions of probable environmental effects for each of the resource areas topics listed above.

Aesthetics

Implementation of the Project would allow for turbine heights up to 493-feet-tall, which is taller than those turbine heights analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR. The Project would construct four fewer new turbines compared to the previous project analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR. In addition, the Project would decommission and remove all of the 69 existing older on-site turbines, which is approximately 53 more than what was analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR. However, due to the increase in new turbine heights, potential changes to visual resources-related impacts as disclosed in the WECS 20 FEIR will be addressed in Draft SEIR.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Due to the changes proposed as a part of Project implementation will generate air and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions during the short-term construction phase (dust and vehicle emissions) and, to a lesser extent, during the long-term operational phase (vehicle emissions from O&M related trips). Both construction and operational emissions will be required to comply with South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) regulations, as well as other applicable federal, state, and regional requirements. As such, potential changes to air quality and GHG emissions-related impacts as disclosed in the WECS 20 FEIR will be addressed in Draft SEIR.

Biological and Cultural/Tribal Cultural Resources

The change in the number of new turbines compared with the previous project analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR, as well as the change in the number of existing turbines to be decommissioned, will result in a change in both temporary and permanent footprint that will be affected by Project construction and operations. This change in impacted footprint could result in an increase (or decrease) in the amount of Project activities that need to occur within area that are potentially sensitive for biological and/or cultural/tribal cultural resources. In addition, the WECS 20 FEIR did not take into account that portions of the existing site access road traverse jurisdictional waters of the U.S. and state. Further, since certification of the WECS 20 FEIR, the City has become a signatory to the Western Coachella Valley MSHCP. Therefore, potential changes to biological and cultural/tribal cultural resources-related impacts as disclosed in the WECS 20 FEIR will be addressed in Draft SEIR.

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Noise

As previously discussed, implementation of the Project would allow for taller turbine heights than those turbine heights analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR. In addition, the Project would construct less new turbines compared to the previous project analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR and would decommission and remove all of the 69 existing older on-site turbines, which is far more than what was analyzed in the WECS 20 FEIR. Each of these proposed changes will need to be further analyzed in order to ensure that no new or more severe noise effects would occur as a result of the Project. As such, potential changes to noise-related impacts as disclosed in the WECS 20 FEIR will be addressed in Draft SEIR.

Effects That Would Not Change

Because of proposed changes between the previous project and the current Project, it is anticipated that many of the impact conclusions presented in the WECS 20 EIR would not change. As a result, the City is proposing to “focus out” the following resource areas and will address these topics in Draft SEIR to a lesser extent compared with those areas listed above (albeit still supported by substantive evidence, if and where applicable):

- Agriculture and Forestry Resources
- Geology/Soils
- Hazards/Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology/Water Quality
- Land Use/Planning
- Mineral Resources
- Population/Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation
- Transportation/Traffic
- Utilities/Service Systems

Scoping Meeting

A public scoping meeting will be held on September 13, 2018 at 2:00 p.m., at:

Carl May Community Center
11711 West Drive
Desert Hot Springs, CA 92240

At this meeting, agencies, organizations, and the public will be able to review the Project and provide comments on the scope of the environmental review process.