

Environmental impact report, economic study released for second Carrizo Plain solar project

Aaron Crutchfield, Atascadero News, 3-25-11

The final environmental impact report for the Topaz Solar Farm, a 550-megawatt solar project proposed for the Carrizo Plain near Carrisa Plains Elementary School, was released Monday on the heels of an economic study that states the project would pump nearly \$417 million into the county's economy.

The project, proposed adjacent to Highway 58 and east of Bitterwater Road, would be installed on a 4,000- to 4,100-acre site and generate energy to be sold to Pacific Gas & Electric under a long-term contract. The site is located about six miles west of the California Valley Solar Ranch, a 250-megawatt project recently approved by the San Luis Obispo County Planning Commission and under appeal to the Board of Supervisors.

There are actually two study areas under consideration for the site, the southernmost of which is about 7,800 acres and avoids all Williamson Act lands, while the northernmost study area is about 6,300 acres and includes about 1,795 acres under Williamson Act contract. Both study areas were analyzed in the EIR but the project would only be built on one location if approved by the county.

The project would require the installation of up to 9 million photovoltaic solar panels in about 460 arrays, each in the neighborhood of 5 1/2 feet tall. Each array would generate about 1.3 megawatts and cover seven acres.

The Morro Bay-Midway power transmission runs through the site.

According to the EIR, the proposed project as a whole would create significant unmitigatable project-related and cumulative impacts as far as aesthetics, agriculture, land use, noise and transportation and circulation. There would be impacts to biological resources that would be significant. There would also be significant impacts that could be mitigated.