



# County of Fresno

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Chairman  
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District Five

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**Buddy Mendes**  
District Four

**Brian Pacheco**  
District One

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District Two

**Sal Quintero**  
District Three

**Bernice E. Seidel**  
Clerk

Notice of hearing before the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno on **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT NO. 7225** and **UNCLASSIFIED CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS NO. 3550, 3551, 3552, 3553, AND 3577** filed by **FIRST SOLAR 1 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 3 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 4 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 5 LLC, and FIRST SOLAR 6 LLC**. Note: On December 6, 2018, the Fresno County Planning Commission denied this application, and on December 18, 2018, an appeal was filed by Robert Holbrook Manager, Project Development, First Solar Inc. to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Notice is hereby given that the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno has set this hearing for **Tuesday, the 26th day of February, 2019**, at the hour of **9:00 A.M. (or as soon thereafter as possible)**, in the **Board of Supervisors Chambers**, Room 301, Hall of Records, 2281 Tulare St., Fresno, California, as the time and place for holding a public hearing on the following matter:

Allow the construction, operation, maintenance, and ultimate decommissioning of an up to 180-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating facility and associated infrastructure, to be known as Little Bear Solar 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 on approximately 1,288 acres in the AE-20 (Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size) Zone District. No Little Bear 2 facility is proposed. The solar facility would consist of five individual facilities, ranging from approximately 161 to 322 acres, with a 60-foot monopole design telecommunications tower and associated equipment proposed at the Little Bear Solar 1 site. Each individual facility would include a substation, inverters, transformers, and a 34.5 kilovolt (kV) overhead collection system, and could include an energy storage system. Other necessary infrastructure would include a permanent operation and maintenance building, water storage, meteorological data system, access roads, telecommunications infrastructure, and security fencing. The Project site is located approximately 13 miles east of Interstate 5, approximately 2 miles southwest of the City of Mendota, and adjacent to and west of State Route 33. The Project site is comprised of approximately 1,288 acres of Westlands Water District-owned lands, and would encompass the six parcels. A new 115 kV generation tie-line will be strung along the existing North Star generation tie-line, which has been constructed within private easements along W. California Avenue (Solar Facility APNs: 019-110-03ST, -04ST, -05ST, -06ST, and -13ST) (Sup Dist. 1).

Please see map included

For more information contact **Chrissy Monfette**, Department of Public Works and Planning, 2220 Tulare Street (corner of Tulare & "M" Streets, Suite A), Fresno, CA 93721, telephone **(559) 600-4245**, email **CMonfette@co.fresno.ca.us**.

The Agenda and Staff Reports will be on the Fresno County web site

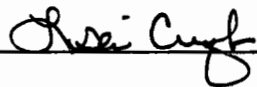
<https://fresnocounty.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx> by Wednesday, February 20, 2019 by 6:00 p.m.

NOTES:

- Anyone may testify, please share this notice with your neighbors or anyone you feel may be interested.
- The Board of Supervisors will also accept written testimony such as letters, petitions, and statements. In order to provide adequate review time for the Board of Supervisors, please submit these documents to the Clerk to Board prior to the hearing date.
- If at some later date you challenge the final action on this matter in court, you may be limited to raising only those issues you or someone else raised at the public hearing described in this notice or in written correspondence delivered to the Board of Supervisors at, or prior to, the public hearing.

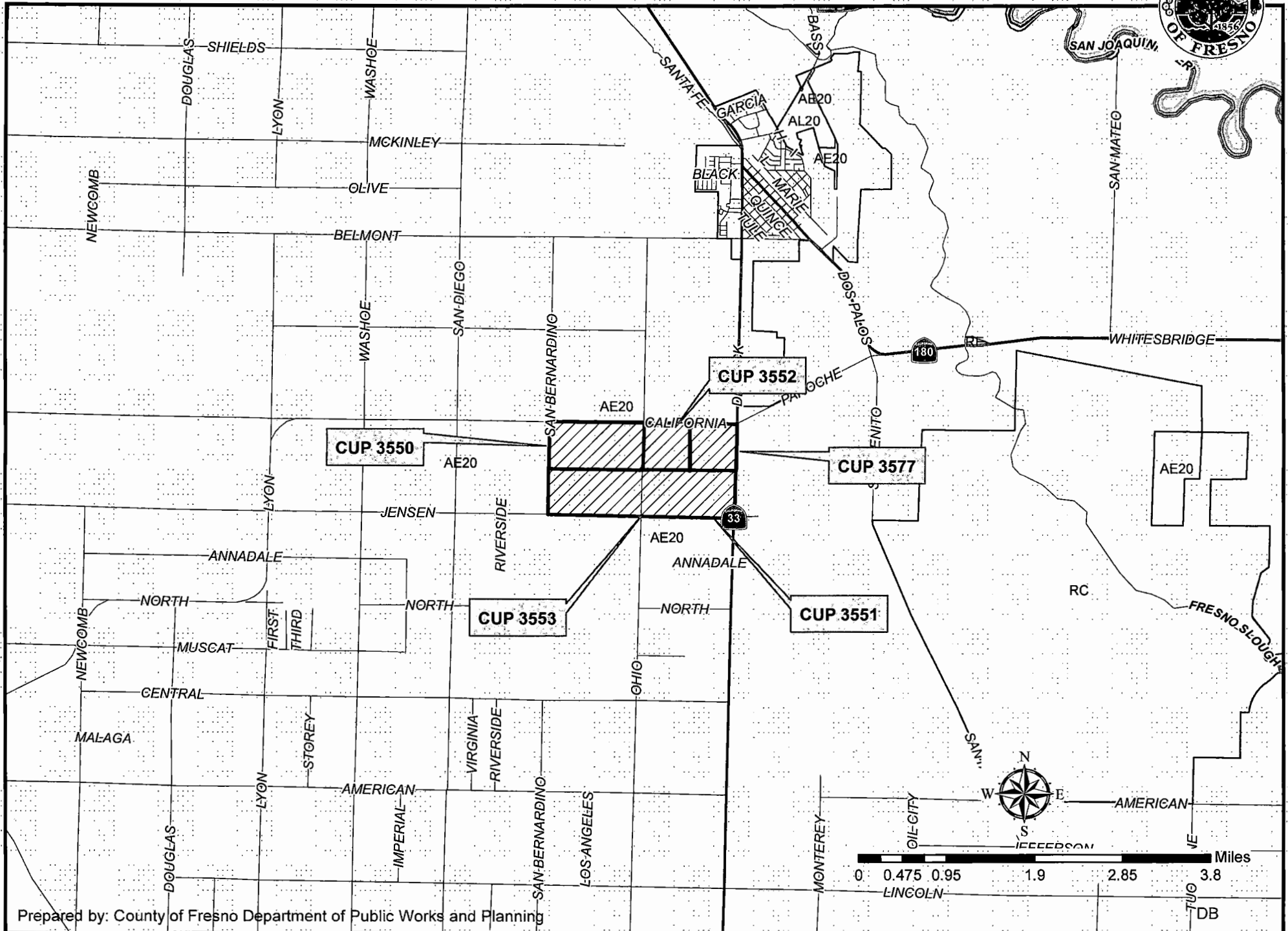
DATED: February 8, 2019

BERNICE E. SEIDEL  
Board of Supervisors

By , Deputy

CUP 3550 - 53, 77  
STR 13,14 - 14/14

# EXISTING ZONING MAP

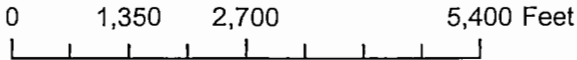
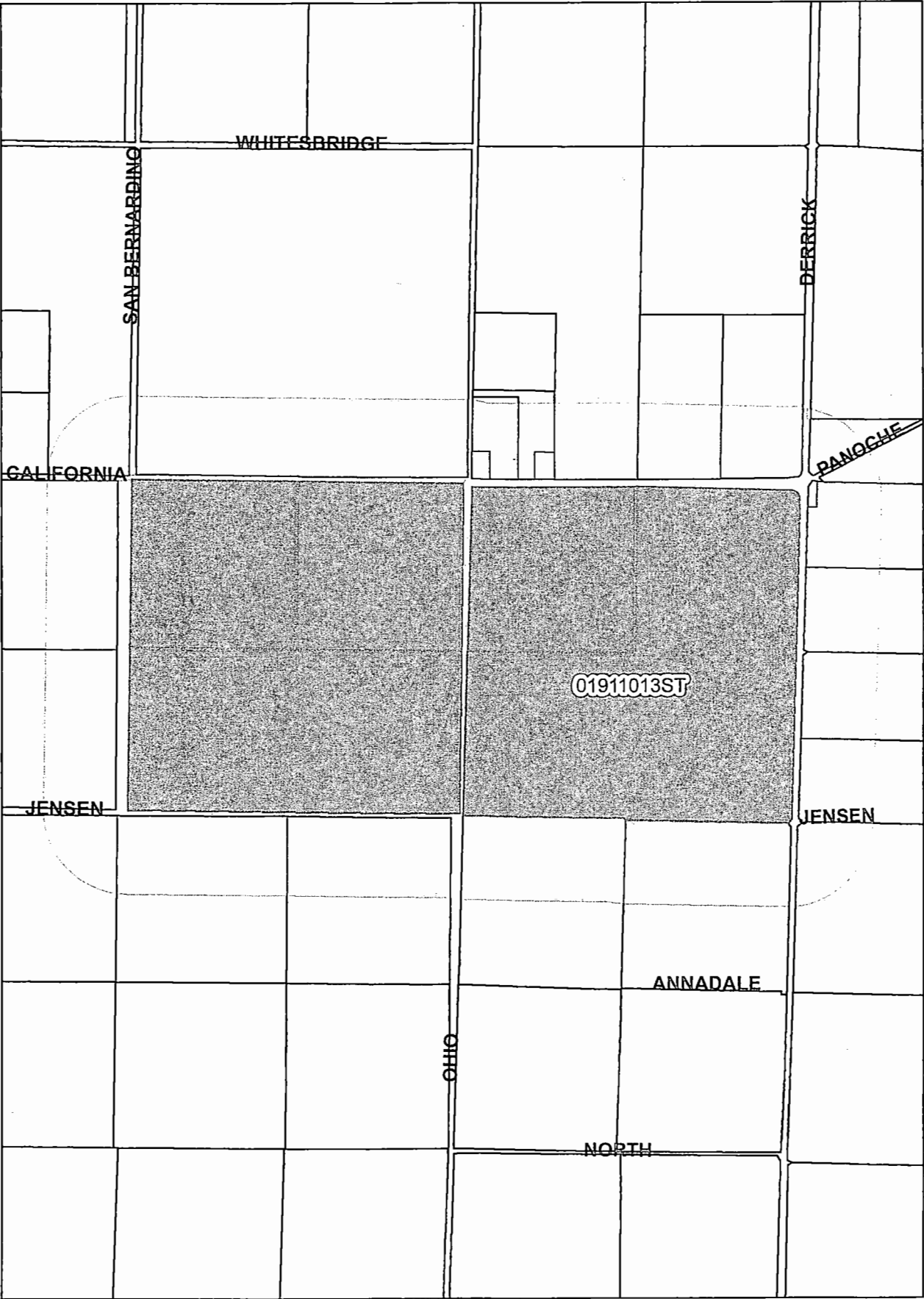




CUP3550,51,52,53,77



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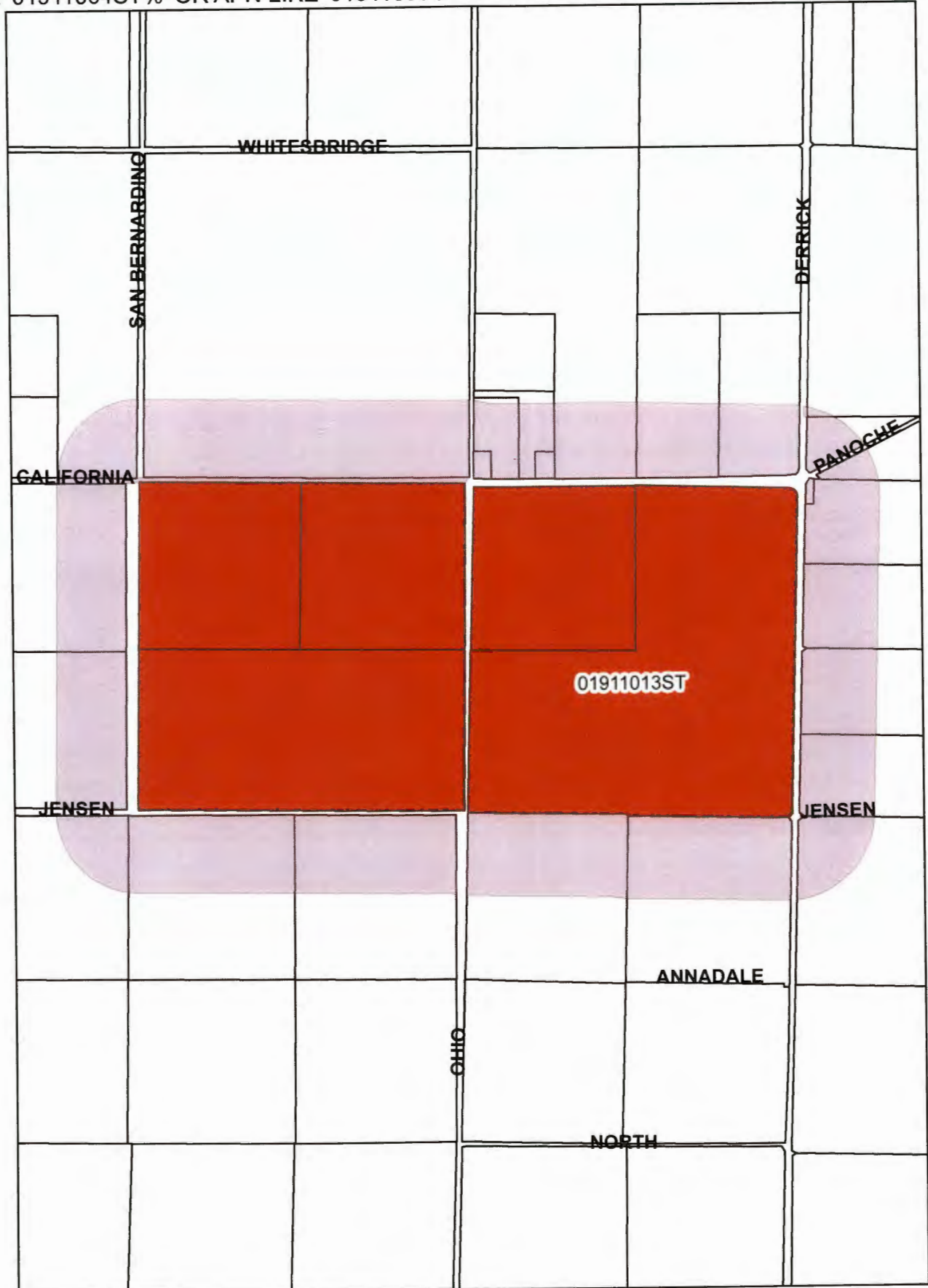
Date: 11/16/2018



# CUP3550,51,52,53,77



APN LIKE '01911004ST%' OR APN LIKE '01911005ST%' OR APN LIKE '01911006ST%' OR APN LIKE '01911



0 1,350 2,700 5,400 Feet

Date: 11/16/2018

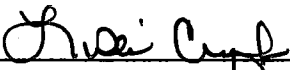
## Proof of Service by Mail

(Code of Civil Procedure § 1013a)

I, Lisa Craft, declare as follows:

1. I am over 18 years of age and not a party to the matter connected with this proof of service.
2. I am employed by the County of Fresno in the office of the Clerk of the Board of Supervisors, at 2281 Tulare Street, Room 301, in Fresno, California 93721.
3. On February 8, 2019, I served the attached Notice of Hearing before the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno for the **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT NO. 7225** and **UNCLASSIFIED CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS NO. 3550, 3551, 3552, 3553, AND 3577** filed by **FIRST SOLAR 1 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 3 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 4 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 5 LLC, and FIRST SOLAR 6 LLC.**
4. I served the documents by enclosing them in an envelope and placing the envelope for collection and mailing following our ordinary business practices. I am readily familiar with this business's practice for collecting and processing correspondence for mailing. On the same day that correspondence is placed for collection and mailing, it is deposited in the ordinary course of business with the United States Postal Service in a sealed envelope with postage fully prepaid.
5. The envelopes were addressed and mailed to each of the owners at their addresses, as shown on the current Fresno County Assessment Roll and on the property list compiled from said rolls, as set forth on the attached.

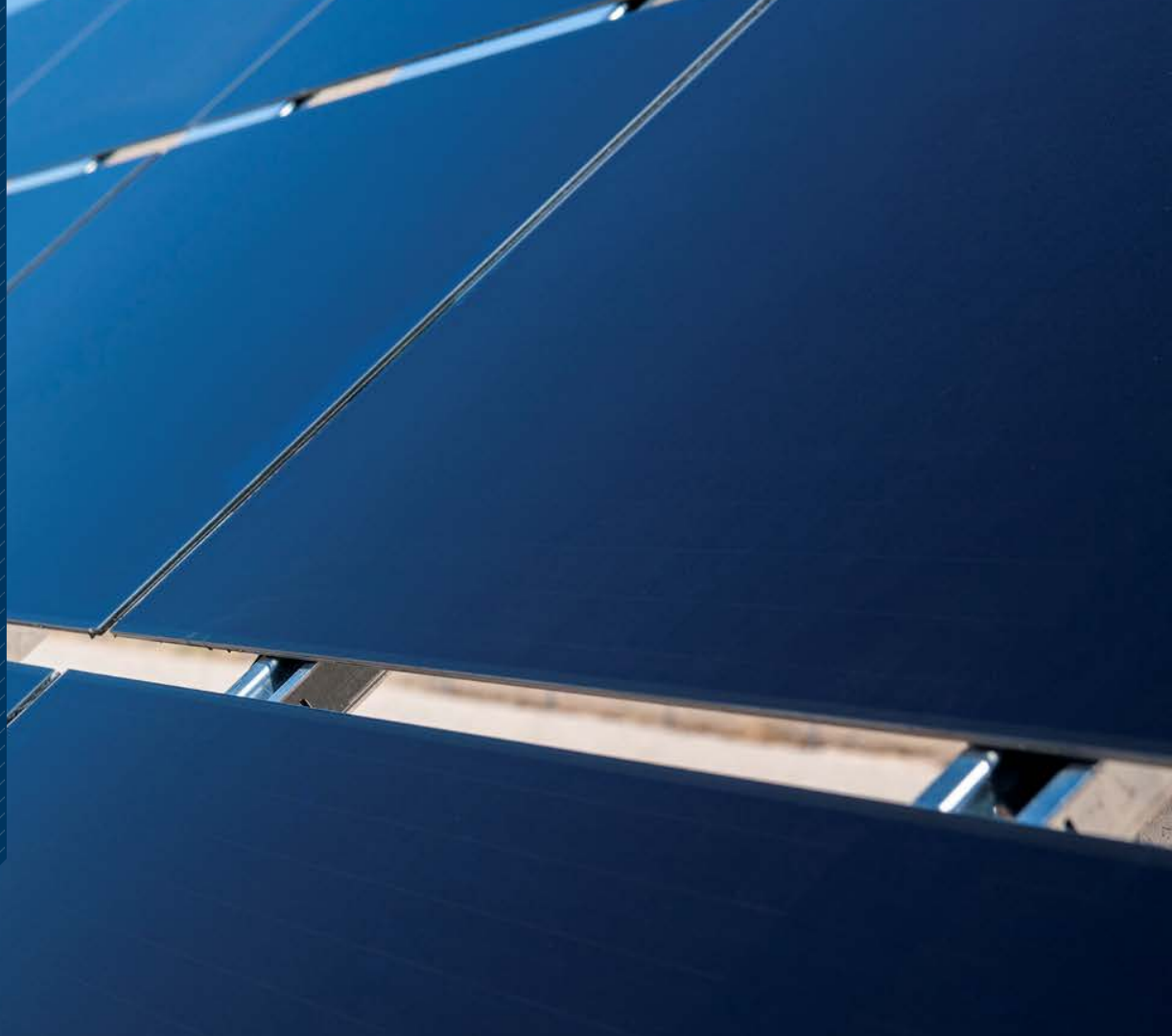
I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed on this 8<sup>th</sup> day of February, 2019 in Fresno, California.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Deputy, Clerk of the Board

# FIRST SOLAR OVERVIEW/ LITTLE BEAR SOLAR PROJECT

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February 26, 2019



# FIRST SOLAR AT A GLANCE



Largest U.S. manufacturer of thin-film photovoltaic solar panels



Develop, construct and operate some of the world's largest utility-scale solar power plants



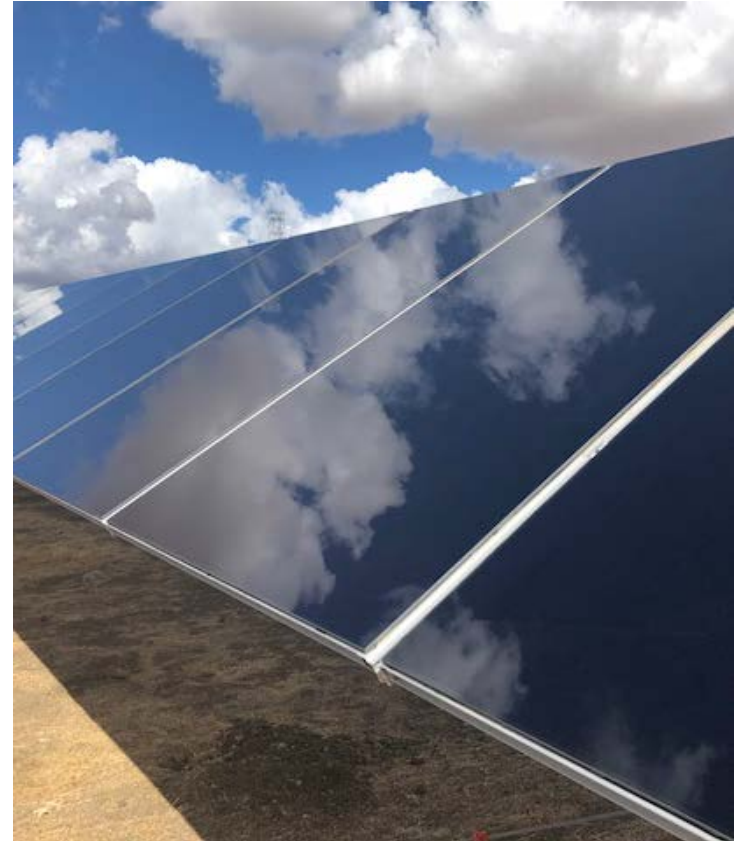
Over 17GW of capacity sold worldwide (equivalent capacity to about 8.5 Hoover Dams)



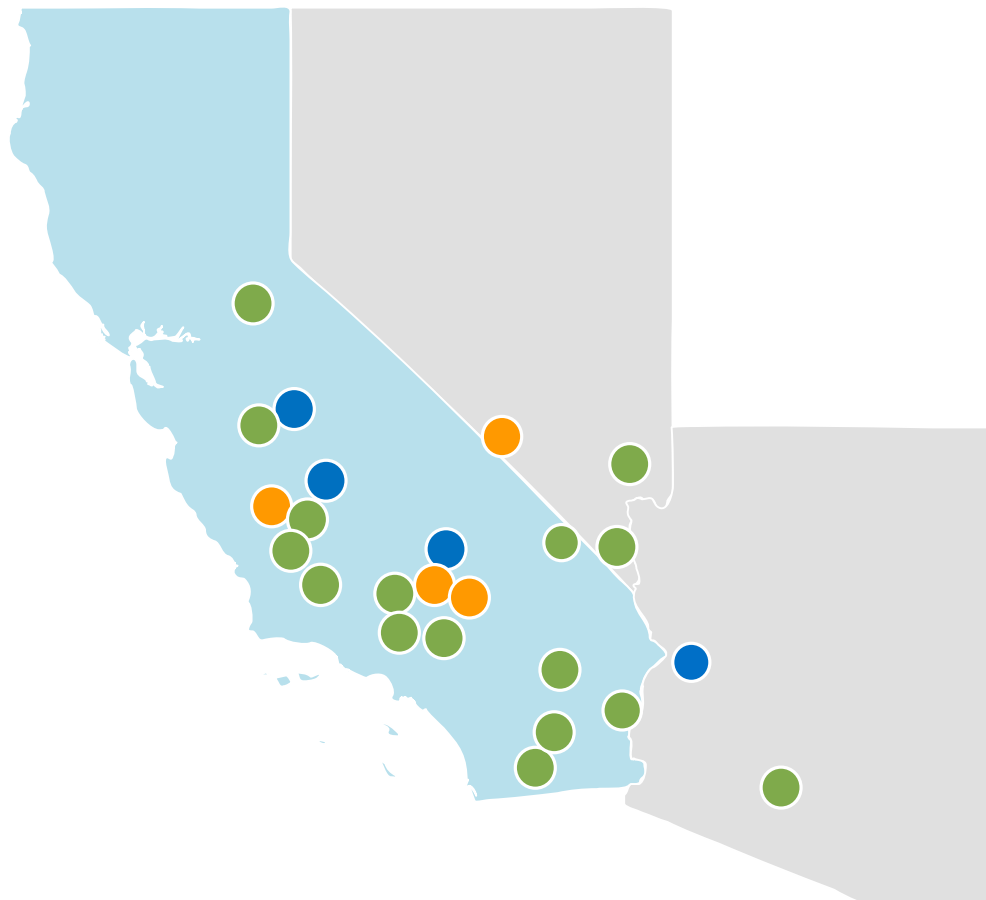
Founded in 1999 and publicly traded on NASDAQ as FSLR



Generating clean solar energy that is economically competitive with fossil fuels with NO carbon emissions or air pollutants



# FIRST SOLAR DEVELOPED PROJECTS SERVING CALIFORNIA ~ 4 GW



- In Operation - 16
- Under Construction - 4
- In Development with PPA - 4

# LITTLE BEAR SOLAR PROJECT OVERVIEW

- 180 MW on retired Westlands agricultural land
- Power Purchase Agreement with **Marin Clean Energy** for 160 MW
- Construction expected to begin **late 2019**
- Operations beginning **late 2020**
- Will generate enough clean solar energy to serve the needs of about **54,000** homes per year
- Will displace **102,000** metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> annually and help California meet its renewable energy goals



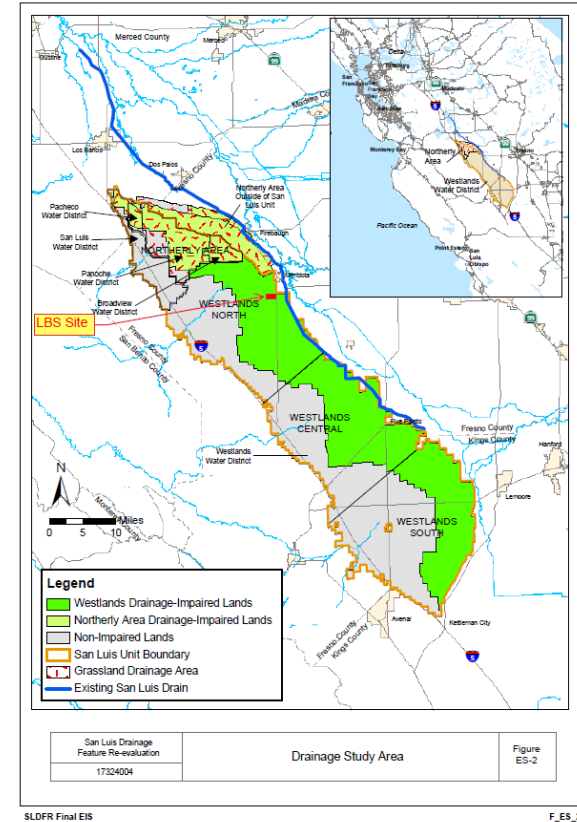
# LITTLE BEAR SOLAR PROJECT BENEFITS

- Will create 500 construction jobs on average, priority for local hires
- Generates up to approximately \$2M to Fresno County sales tax
- Generates property taxes over the 20 year life of the project, including \$87,000 in the first year and \$800,000 in the first decade
- Provides direct and indirect benefits to dozens of business in Fresno County
- Committed to being a good neighbor and giving back to the community

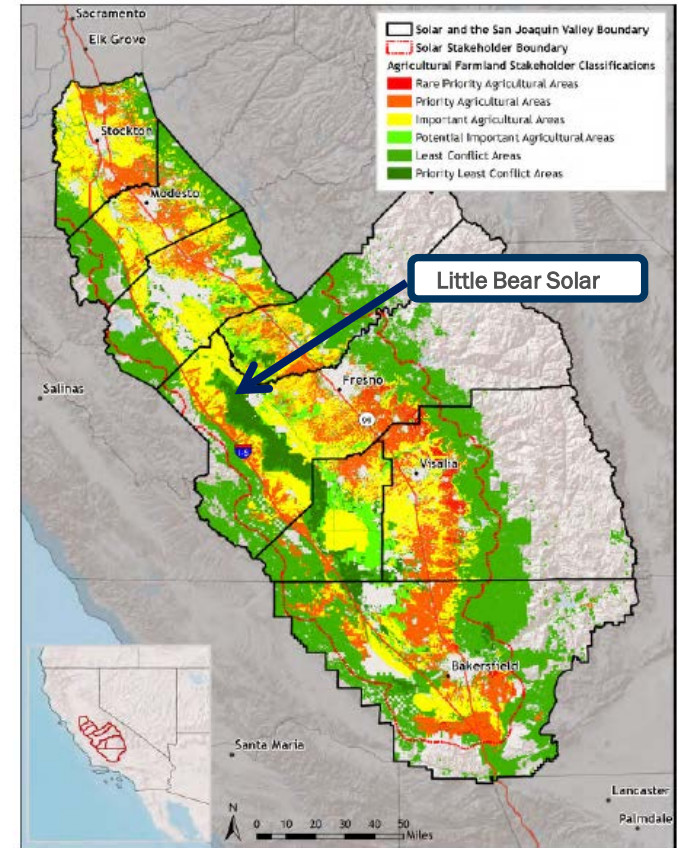
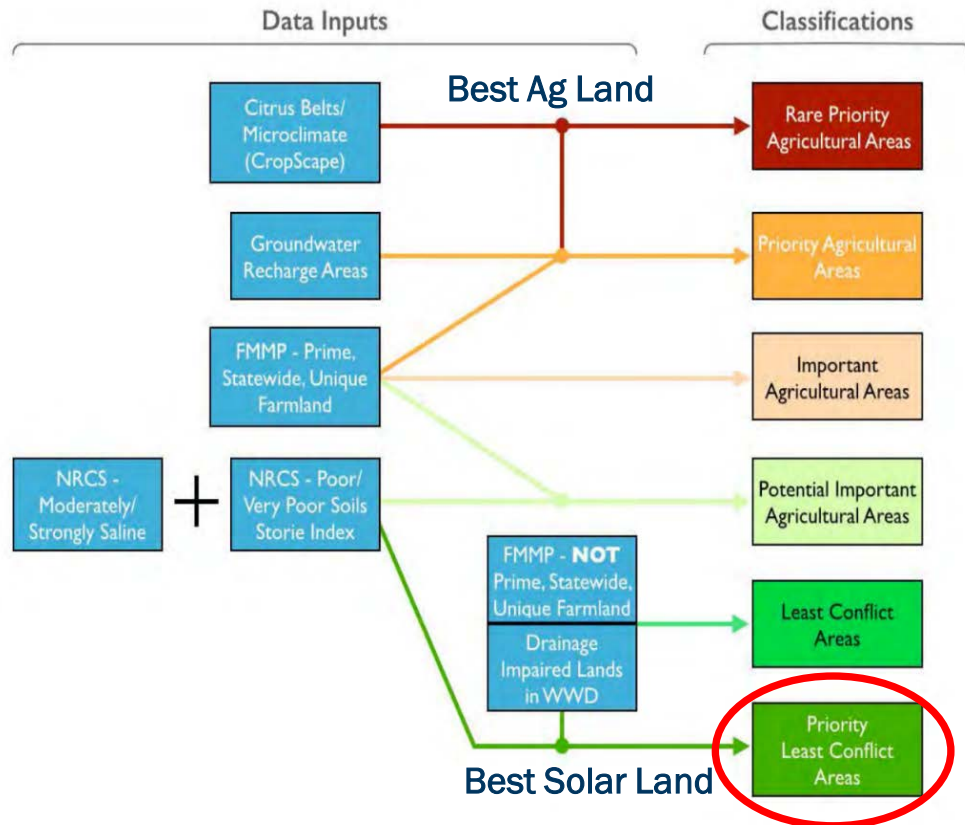


# PROJECT IS WELL SITED AND MEETS COUNTY'S GENERAL PLAN REQUIREMENTS

- Located within Westlands' drainage-impaired lands and avoids Prime Agricultural land
- Land designated to be used for renewable energy as part of settlement with U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
- Very low agricultural value and irrigation is prohibited
- Frequently fallowed - dry farmed on occasion
- Not designated as Prime, Unique or Farmland of Statewide Importance



# "A PATH FORWARD" STUDY SUPPORTS BEST SITING OF LITTLE BEAR PROJECT



# LITTLE BEAR HAS BROAD STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT



# LITTLE BEAR SOLAR PROJECT – SOLAR & AGRICULTURE ARE COMPATIBLE

Creating Local Jobs, Economic Benefits, Clean Renewable Energy



First Solar Proprietary & Confidential - General

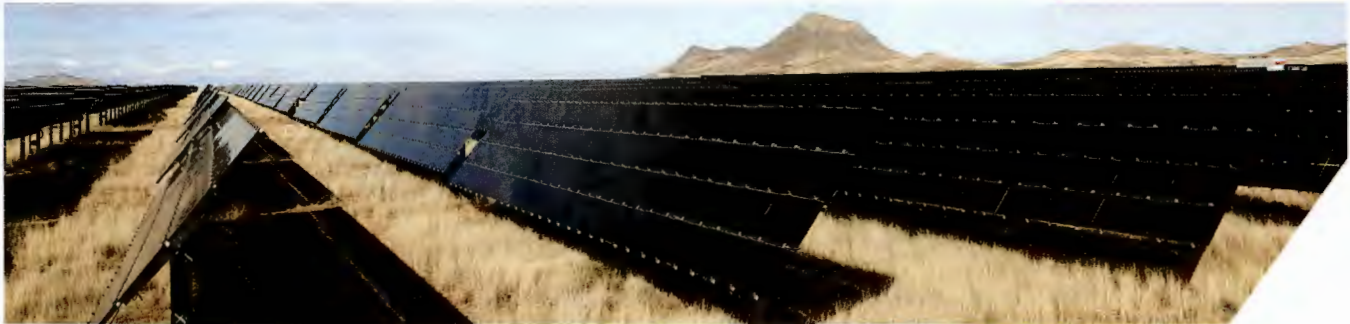




# Little Bear Solar

FRESNO COUNTY, CALIFORNIA, USA

PERMITTING PHASE



## AT A GLANCE

### First Solar

DEVELOPER, OWNER,  
CONSTRUCTION

**180MW AC**

PROJECT SIZE

**160MW AC**

PPA WITH MARIN CLEAN ENERGY

### Ground-Mount PV

TYPE

**~500 JOBS**

CONSTRUCTION WORKFORCE

**~54,000 HOMES**

POWER OUTPUT EQUIVALENT  
(average California homes)

**~102,000 METRIC TONS**

CO<sub>2</sub>e DISPLACED ANNUALLY

**~20,000 CARS**

OFF THE ROAD

**~82,600 METRIC TONS**

H<sub>2</sub>O SAVED ANNUALLY

First Solar, a leading provider of comprehensive photovoltaic (PV) energy solutions, is developing Little Bear Solar, a 180-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) solar project, located on approximately 1,280 acres in Mendota, California. First Solar is the project owner and will construct the Project using photovoltaic (PV) solar modules. The Project has a Power Purchase Agreement with Marin Clean Energy for 160MW.

When fully operational, the project will generate enough clean solar energy to serve the needs of about 54,000 homes per year, displacing approximately 102,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) annually—the equivalent of taking about 20,000 cars off the road. The Project will connect to the transmission grid via the adjacent Mendota Substation.

Little Bear Solar is currently going through the environmental permitting process. Construction of the Project is expected to begin in late 2019.

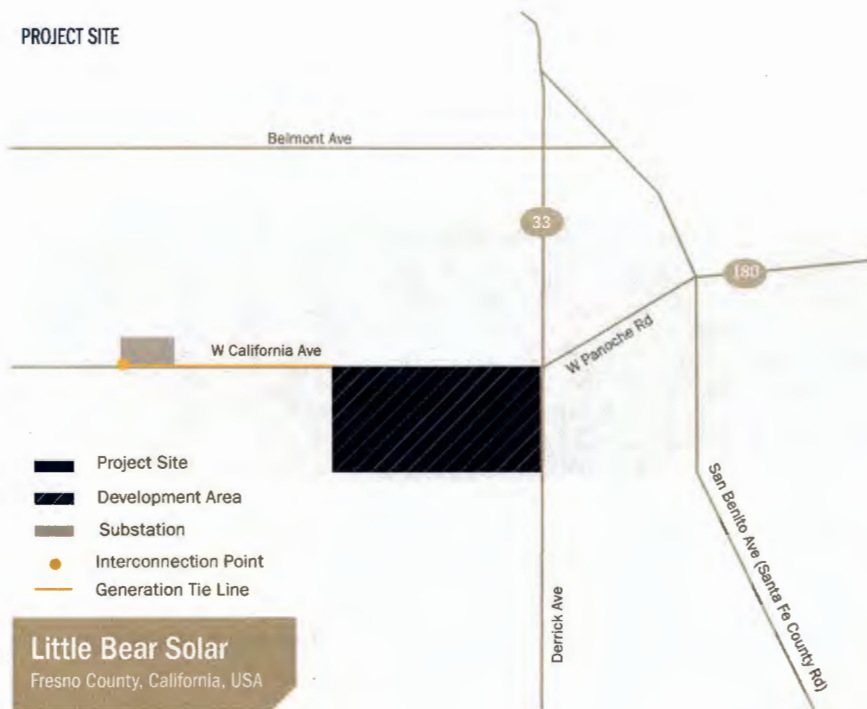
## PROJECT BENEFITS

- Generates 160MW of clean power
- No water used to generate electricity
- No air emissions during operations
- Generates wages and benefits for approximately 500 construction jobs on average
- Provides direct and indirect benefits to dozens of businesses in Fresno County
- Minimal noise
- Low visual impact

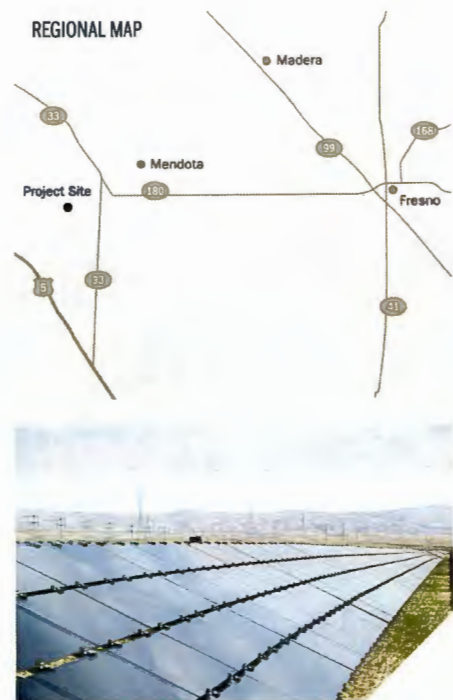
## PROJECT TIMELINE



## PROJECT SITE



## REGIONAL MAP



## COMMUNITY

First Solar is committed to being a good neighbor through our community involvement and the environmentally sensitive design of our solar projects. First Solar will engage the community, interest groups and business organizations as appropriate to ensure that Little Bear Solar remains a valued and respected business in Fresno County.

Little Bear Solar will generate substantial income for the community and provide wages for approximately 500 construction jobs, and create benefits for many local businesses. First Solar will seek to provide employment opportunities for qualified members of the community.

## ENVIRONMENT

First Solar projects have a low resource impact. When in operation, our quiet systems generate electricity with no water use, no air emissions, and no waste production. Mounted to metal racks, the PV panels are no higher than thirteen feet above ground and have a low visual profile.

The Little Bear Solar project site was carefully selected and will have minimal impact on the environment. The availability of land near existing electrical transmission facilities, the amount of sunlight and benefits to the local community were important considerations in the siting decision.

Construction planning for the project will include the implementation of appropriate dust control measures, as well as truck routes that will minimize traffic.



## ABOUT FIRST SOLAR

First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive photovoltaic (PV) solar energy solutions that are taking energy forward. With more than 17 gigawatts (GW) sold worldwide, we develop, finance, engineer, construct and operate some of the world's largest and most successful PV power plants in existence today.

## CONTACT US

ALEX MARTIN | COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
(415) 308-3405

# Little Bear Solar Project Supporters



| Organization                                     | Contact Person                                            | Email                        | Phone                            |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Westlands Water District                         | Russ Freeman<br>Deputy General Manager -<br>Resources     | rffreeman@westlandswater.org | 559-241-6241<br>(Direct)         |
| Fresno County Farm<br>Bureau                     | Ryan Jacobsen<br>CEO                                      | ryan@fcfb.org                | 559-237-0263<br>(General Office) |
| Fresno Chamber of<br>Commerce                    | Nathan Ahle<br>President & CEO                            | nahle@fresnochamber.com      | 559-495-4800<br>(General Office) |
| Bryant L. Jolley Certified<br>Public Accountants | Bryant L. Jolley C.P.A.                                   | jollmann@sbcglobal.com       | 559-659-3045<br>(General Office) |
| City of Mendota                                  | Robert Silva<br>Mayor                                     | rsilva@cityofmendota.com     | 559-655-3291<br>(General Office) |
| Fresno County EDC                                | Lee Ann Eager<br>President & CEO                          | leager@fresnoedc.com         | 559-476-2513<br>(Direct)         |
| The Nature Conservancy                           | Jay Zeigler<br>Director of External Affairs<br>and Policy | jay_zeigler@tnc.org          | 415-777-0487<br>(Direct)         |



## Westlands Water District

3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056, Fresno, California 93703-6056, (559) 224-1523, FAX (559) 241-6277

February 20, 2019

County Board of Supervisors  
Attention: Bernice Seidel, Clerk of the Board  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

Re: First Solar's Appeal of the Planning Commission's Decision to Deny a Conditional Use Permit for the Little Bear Solar Project

Dear Honorable Supervisors,

The purpose of this letter is to provide additional information for the Board that may bear on its consideration of First Solar's appeal of the Planning Commission's denial of its Conditional Use Permit Application for the proposed Little Bear Solar Project (Project). It is our understanding that during the Planning Commission meeting there was uncertainty as to whether the parcels that are proposed for the Project are productive agricultural parcels. As the landowner, Westlands Water District (District) believes it can provide some perspective on the parcels' status.

The District acquired the subject parcels pursuant to a December 11, 2002 legal settlement between the original landowner(s), the United States, and the District over the failure to provide drainage service. The settlement required that the District take title to the land subject to a covenant that prohibits irrigation from any source. Additionally, the District no longer allocates water from its Central Valley Project Water Service Contracts to these parcels. Finally, under implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, the District, acting as the Groundwater Sustainability Agency for the Westside Subbasin, does not plan to make an annual groundwater pumping allowance to these parcels.

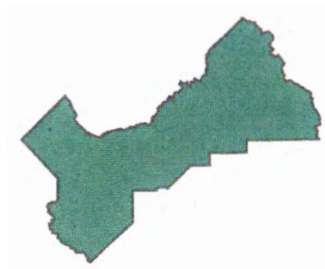
Since the District acquired the parcels, they have been dry farmed and grazed with limited success. The District believes that the highest and best use of these parcels is solar development. The Project will provide economic stimulus to westside communities and improved tax base for Fresno County.

I plan to attend the meeting on February 26, 2019 and will make myself available to answer any additional questions the Supervisors may have. I may also be contacted at 559-241-6241.

Sincerely,

Russ Freeman

Deputy General Manager - Resources



February 14, 2019

Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
Attn: Bernice Seidel, Clerk of the Board  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

Re: Little Bear Solar Project

Dear Fresno County Board of Supervisors,

On behalf of the Fresno County Farm Bureau (FCFB), I write in support of First Solar's Little Bear Solar Project (LBSP).

The proposed LBSP is located within Westlands Water District on "retired" irrigated farmland. FCFB believes the site represents the type of responsible solar development that should be pursued in the region. The retired land has little agricultural viability as it does not have a contract for surface water. The LBSP project allows for a use of the property, while preserving prime lands with irrigation water for agricultural production.

We ask the Board to please support the LBSP as a responsible renewable energy development.

Sincerely,

Ryan Jacobsen  
CEO



February 6, 2019

Supervisor Quintero  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

**RE: Fresno Chamber of Commerce- Comments on Little Bear Solar Project**

Dear Supervisor Quintero,

Sal,

On behalf of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and its 1,200 members, representing 78,000 jobs in our region I am writing to you in support of Little Bear Solar's proposed project in Fresno County. First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive solar energy solutions that are moving the energy industry forward.

It is our understanding that the Little Bear Solar project in Mendota will generate enough clean solar energy to supply approximately 54,000 homes per year. This will result in the displacement of approximately 102,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide—roughly the same amount as 20,000 cars being taken off the road.

The Fresno Chamber of Commerce focuses on promoting a strong local economy. This project is estimated to create 500 construction jobs and First Solar is committed to providing employment for our residents that meet qualifications once construction is complete. The economic and environmental benefits to this project align with the needs of our ever-growing County.

We would be proud to support a project that is able to deliver the significant economic benefits offered by the Little Bear Solar project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Nathan Able", is written over a faint, circular official stamp.

Nathan Able  
President & CEO  
Fresno Chamber of Commerce



February 6, 2019

Supervisor Magsig  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

**RE: Fresno Chamber of Commerce- Comments on Little Bear Solar Project**

Dear Supervisor Magsig,

*Nathan*

On behalf of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and its 1,200 members, representing 78,000 jobs in our region I am writing to you in support of Little Bear Solar's proposed project in Fresno County. First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive solar energy solutions that are moving the energy industry forward.

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Sincerely,

A blue ink signature, appearing to read "Nathan Ahle", is written over a circular stamp or seal.

Nathan Ahle  
President & CEO  
Fresno Chamber of Commerce



February 6, 2019

Supervisor Mendes  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

**RE: Fresno Chamber of Commerce- Comments on Little Bear Solar Project**

Dear Supervisor Mendes, *Buddy,*

On behalf of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and its 1,200 members, representing 78,000 jobs in our region I am writing to you in support of Little Bear Solar's proposed project in Fresno County. First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive solar energy solutions that are moving the energy industry forward.

It is our understanding that the Little Bear Solar project in Mendota will generate enough clean solar energy to supply approximately 54,000 homes per year. This will result in the displacement of approximately 102,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide—roughly the same amount as 20,000 cars being taken off the road.

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We would be proud to support a project that is able to deliver the significant economic benefits offered by the Little Bear Solar project.

Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Nathan Ahle, consisting of stylized, overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Nathan Ahle  
President & CEO  
Fresno Chamber of Commerce



February 6, 2019

Supervisor Pacheco  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

RE: **Fresno Chamber of Commerce- Comments on Little Bear Solar Project**

Dear Supervisor Pacheco, *Brian,*

On behalf of the Fresno Chamber of Commerce and its 1,200 members, representing 78,000 jobs in our region I am writing to you in support of Little Bear Solar's proposed project in Fresno County. First Solar is a leading global provider of comprehensive solar energy solutions that are moving the energy industry forward.

It is our understanding that the Little Bear Solar project in Mendota will generate enough clean solar energy to supply approximately 54,000 homes per year. This will result in the displacement of approximately 102,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide – roughly the same amount as 20,000 cars being taken off the road.

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Sincerely,

A blue ink signature of Nathan Ahle, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Nathan Ahle  
President & CEO  
Fresno Chamber of Commerce

# BRYANT L. JOLLEY

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS

Bryant L. Jolley C.P.A.  
Ryan P. Jolley C.P.A.  
Darryl L. Smith C.P.A.  
Janibu Nelson C.P.A.  
Ian T. Kimoto  
Jeffrey M. Schill

February 21, 2019

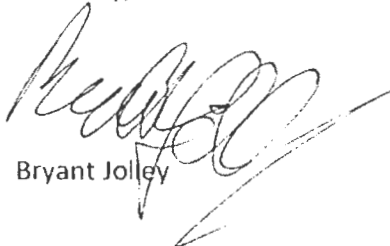
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
Fresno County Hall of Records  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

Re: Support for First Solar's Little Bear Solar Project

Dear Board of Supervisors:

My name is Bryant Jolley, I reside at 6685 N Sequoia, Fresno, Ca 93711 and own the two parcels just to the west of the Little Bear Solar Project that is coming before you for approval on February 26. I've had the pleasure of working with the First Solar team over the last 4 years on the original project and they have been great to work with. Their existing power lines run across my property for nearly a mile and I have had no issues with them. When one considers the additional tax revenues to be generated by this project with little or no impact on services, it would appear to be a very desirable project. I recommend that you consider approving the Little Bear Solar project.

Sincerely,



Bryant Jolley



# CITY OF MENDOTA

*"Cantaloupe Center Of The World"*

February 12, 2019

Nathan Magsig, Chairman  
Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
Fresno County Hall of Records  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

Honorable Supervisor Magsig,

On behalf of the City Council of the City of Mendota, I am writing to convey our strong support of the Little Bear Solar Project, and to encourage the Fresno County Board of Supervisors to overturn the denial of the Fresno County Planning Commission.

The approval of the Little Bear Solar Project is of utmost importance to the community of Mendota due to the lasting environmental and economic impacts that it will have as a result of its close proximity to the City. The project puts land that has been intermittently used or left fallow for many years to consistent and productive use. Construction on land that, in recent history, has been underused or not utilized at all will minimize the amount of dust, fertilizers, and other pollinary irritants close to our City.

The project will also further support the County's energy policy goal to contribute to California's long-term renewable energy development and greenhouse gas reduction goals. The project will generate renewable solar electricity that will offset the emission of air pollutants that would have resulted from producing an equivalent amount of electricity from fossil fuel-fired generators.

Moreover, the construction of a project this considerable in size will provide a significant economic benefit to Mendota. These benefits include the creation of hundreds of jobs and a stimulation of our local economy through the purchase of needed construction materials and supplies.

It is of concern that it was unclear to both the project's applicant, and to the City, why the project was denied by the Fresno County Planning Commission. In today's political climate it is more important than ever that legislative and advisory bodies avoid creating a perception of decisions being made based on narrow interests. We believe that this project provides benefits to a wide scope of interests, especially for all of the County of Fresno.

We fully support the project and urge the Fresno County Board of Supervisors to approve the appropriate Unclassified Conditional Use Permits.

Respectfully,

Robert Silva  
Mayor  
City of Mendota

CC: Honorable Supervisor Brian Pacheco  
Honorable Supervisor Sal Quintero  
Honorable Supervisor Buddy Mendes



February 12, 2019

Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
Fresno County Hall of Records  
2281 Tulare Street, Room 301  
Fresno, CA 93721

RE: Little Bear Solar Project

Dear Board of Supervisors:

On behalf of the Fresno County Economic Development Corporation (EDC), I am writing to express my support for First Solar's Little Bear Solar Project, and to encourage approval of this project by you, the Fresno County Board of Supervisors.

The Fresno County EDC is a private non-profit organization established to market Fresno County as the premier location for business prosperity. We not only facilitate site selection for new businesses within Fresno County, but we also assist in the retention and expansion of local businesses. Thus, we support projects like the Little Bear Solar Project that will create hundreds of jobs in one of Fresno County's most economically-distressed regions while moving towards a more sustainable future.

First Solar's project will generate wages and benefits for approximately 500 high-paying construction jobs as well as provide a substantial financial investment into the community. The project will enhance the local economy and boost revenue for local businesses.

Another benefit to Fresno County will be from the production of clean, renewable energy that will help meet its stated renewable energy goals. No water will be used to generate electricity and there will be no air emissions or waste production during operations. This project will generate 180-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) on approximately 1,280 acres of retired Westlands Water District lands near Mendota, California, providing power output for roughly 54,000 homes.

Thank you for considering our support for the Little Bear Solar Project. Should you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me at 559.476.2513 or via email at [leager@fresnoedc.com](mailto:leager@fresnoedc.com).

Sincerely,

Lee Ann Eager, President/CEO  
Fresno County Economic Development Corporation

LAE/cw

To: Nathan Magsig  
Chair, Fresno County Board of Supervisors  
2281 Tulare St. Room #300  
Fresno, CA 93721-2198

Submitted via email to: Clerk/BOS@co.fresno.ca.us

Date: February 20, 2019

Subject: Comments of The Nature Conservancy on the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Little Bear Solar Project

The Nature Conservancy (the Conservancy) is writing in response to the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Little Bear Solar Project (the Project) in Fresno County. We appreciate that Fresno County completed a full Environmental Impact Report for the Project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

The Conservancy's mission is to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends. As part of that mission, the Conservancy is addressing climate change and helping to transition California to a carbon-free economy and clean energy future. This will require tremendous investments in the development of renewable energy over the next several decades. Local jurisdictions, such as Fresno County, will play an important role in advancing renewable energy to meet California's climate goals, alongside other land use objectives.

The Conservancy supports development of renewable energy that has a low impact on natural and working lands and water resources. In 2015, we completed a study that demonstrates we can meet California's renewable energy targets without sacrificing our state's conservation goals<sup>1</sup>. In 2016, a study called "A Path Forward" was completed and identified over 400,000 acres of least conflict lands for solar PV in the San Joaquin Valley<sup>2</sup>. However, with a high electrification scenario for California, reaching our climate goals with in-state resources could require on-going development that may reach up to 1 million acres of solar PV in California<sup>3</sup>, and it is predicted much of this solar may be developed in the San

---

<sup>1</sup> Wu, G., N. Schlag, D. Cameron, E. Brand, L. Crane, J. Williams, S. Price. 2015. Integrating Land Conservation and Renewable Energy Goals in California: A Study of Costs and Impacts Using the Optimal Renewable Energy Build-Out (ORB) Model. Technical Report. 34 pages plus appendices.  
<https://www.scienceforconservation.org/products/integrating-land-conservation-and-renewable-energy-goals>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/A-PATH-FORWARD-May-2016.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Deep Decarbonization in a High Renewables Future: <https://www.ethree.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Deep-Decarbonization-in-a-High-Renewables-Future-CEC-500-2018-012-1.pdf>

Joaquin Valley. We are going to need to look for opportunities for solar PV development that minimizes natural resource, land use, economic and community impacts

After reviewing the FEIR for the Project, the Conservancy believes that development of solar PV in this area would have minimal impact to natural resources, especially when considering implementation of the mitigation measures outlined in the FEIR. The location of the Project does not overlap with any of the avoidance areas (Category 1 or 2) from the Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative<sup>4</sup>, nor does it overlap with avoidance areas from The Nature Conservancy's 2016 Optimal Renewable Resource Buildout study. The Project is located on agricultural land where irrigation is not allowed, so it has either lain fallow or has been dry farmed in recent years. Additionally, the Conservancy has not identified this area as a high priority for endangered species habitat restoration in the San Joaquin Valley. Lastly, the Project is not adjacent to protected area or conservation land, and instead is adjacent to another solar project and a prison.

In conclusion, we support Fresno County's approval of solar PV projects that are sited in places that avoid areas that have been pre-identified as high conflict from an environmental perspective. By siting solar PV development away from places of highest environmental value, we can meet California's aggressive renewable energy goals while also protecting conservation values.

Thank you,

Sincerely,



Jay Zeigler  
Director of External Affairs and Policy  
The Nature Conservancy in California

---

<sup>4</sup> The Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative avoidance areas for Category 1 & 2 can be viewed by following this link: <https://databasin.org/datasets/4d3ea2e9c6d848e6be75f07d02884191>



CC:

Christina Monfette,  
Department of Public Works and Planning  
Development Services and Capital Projects Division  
2220 Tulare St. Suite A, Fresno, CA 93721  
Main Office: (559) 600-4230 Direct: (559) 600-4245  
[cmonfette@fresnocountyca.gov](mailto:cmonfette@fresnocountyca.gov)

John "Jack" Garamendi  
Professional Evaluation Group, Inc.  
[jgaramendi@proegroup.com](mailto:jgaramendi@proegroup.com)  
209-675-8050

# THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

FRESNO | KINGS | MADERA | TULARE

P.O. Box 126

Fresno, CA 93707

Telephone (559) 490-3400

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FEB 19 2019

CLERK. BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

IN THE COUNTY OF FRESNO, STATE OF CALIFORNIA

## Notice of Public Hearing

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT NO. 7225 and  
UNCLASSIFIED CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS  
NO. 3550, 3551, 3552, 3553, AND 3577

DATE AND TIME OF PUBLIC  
HEARING:

February 26, 2019 at 9:00 am

## DECLARATION OF PUBLICATION (2015.5 C.C.P.)

### MISC. NOTICE

## STATE OF CALIFORNIA

### COUNTY OF FRESNO

I am a citizen of the United States and a resident of the County aforesaid; I am over the age of eighteen years, and not a party to or interested in the above entitled matter. I am the principal clerk of **THE BUSINESS JOURNAL** published in the city of Fresno, County of Fresno, State of California, Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and which newspaper has been adjudged a newspaper of general circulation by the Superior Court of the County of Fresno, State of California, under the date of March 4, 1911, in Action No. 14315; that the notice of which the annexed is a printed copy, has been published in each regular and entire issue of said newspaper and not in any supplement thereof on the following dates, to wit:

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct and that this declaration was executed at Fresno, California,

FEBRUARY 13, 2019

ON .....

*Carmen*

### Notice of Public Hearing

Notice of hearing before the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno on ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT NO. 7225 and UNCLASSIFIED CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS NO. 3550, 3551, 3552, 3553, AND 3577 filed by FIRST SOLAR 1 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 3 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 4 LLC, FIRST SOLAR 5 LLC, and FIRST SOLAR 6 LLC. Note: On December 6, 2018, the Fresno County Planning Commission denied this application, and on December 18, 2018, an appeal was filed by Robert Holbrook Manager, Project Development, First Solar Inc. to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors for consideration.

Notice is hereby given that the Board of Supervisors of the County of Fresno has set this hearing for Tuesday, the 26th day of February, 2019, at the hour of 9:00 A.M. (or as soon thereafter as possible), in the Board of Supervisors Chambers, Room 301, Hall of Records, 2281 Tulare St., Fresno, California, as the time and place for holding a public hearing on the following matter:

Allow the construction, operation, maintenance, and ultimate decommissioning of an up to 180-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic (PV) electricity generating facility and associated infrastructure, to be known as Little Bear Solar 1, 3, 4, 5, and 6 on approximately 1,288 acres in the AE-20 (Exclusive Agricultural, 20-acre minimum parcel size) Zone District. No Little Bear 2 facility is proposed. The solar facility would consist of five individual facilities, ranging from approximately 161 to 322 acres, with a 60-foot monopole design telecommunications tower and associated equipment proposed at the Little Bear Solar 1 site. Each individual facility would include a substation, inverters, transformers, and a 34.5 kilovolt (kV) overhead collection system, and could include an energy storage system. Other

necessary infrastructure would include a permanent operation and maintenance building, water storage, meteorological data system, access roads, telecommunications infrastructure, and security fencing. The Project site is located approximately 13 miles east of Interstate 5, approximately 2 miles southwest of the City of Mendota, and adjacent to and west of State Route 33. The Project site is comprised of approximately 1,288 acres of Westlands Water District-owned lands, and would encompass the six parcels. A new 115 kV generation tie-line will be strung along the existing North Star generation tie-line, which has been constructed within private easements along W. California Avenue (Solar Facility APNs: 019-110-03ST, -04ST, -05ST, -06ST, and -13ST) (Sup Dist. 1). For more information contact Chrissy Monfette, Department of Public Works and Planning, 2220 Tulare Street (corner of Tulare & "M" Streets, Suite A), Fresno, CA 93721, telephone (559) 600-4245, email CMonfette@co.fresno.ca.us.

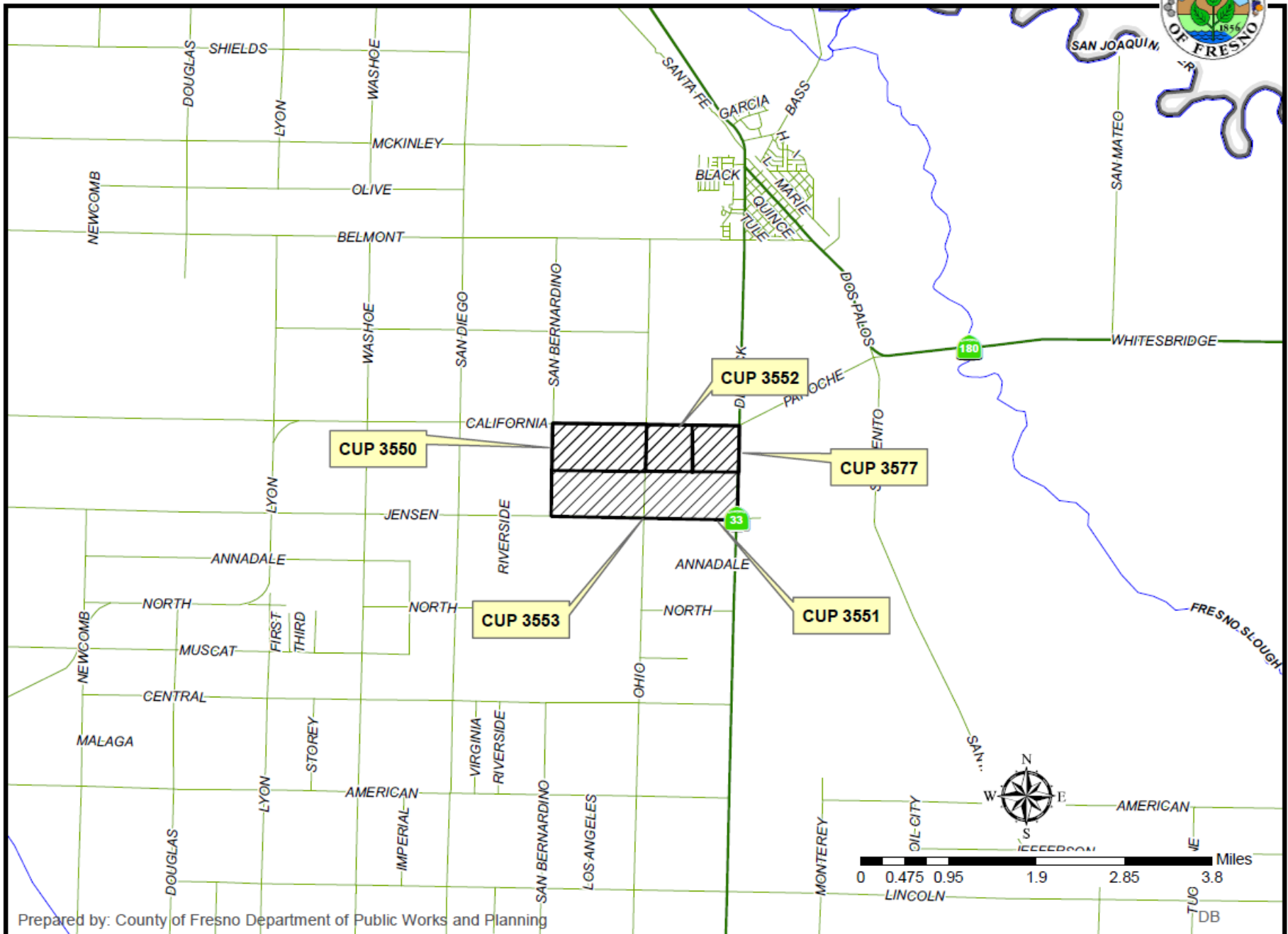
The full text of this Land Use Appeal will be available on the Fresno County website <https://fresnocountylegistar.com/Calendar.aspx> under the February 26, 2019 meeting at the Meeting Details link by Wednesday, February 20, 2019. Nathan Magsig, Chairman Board of Supervisors  
ATTEST:  
BERNICE E. SEIDEL  
Clerk, Board of Supervisors  
02/13/2019



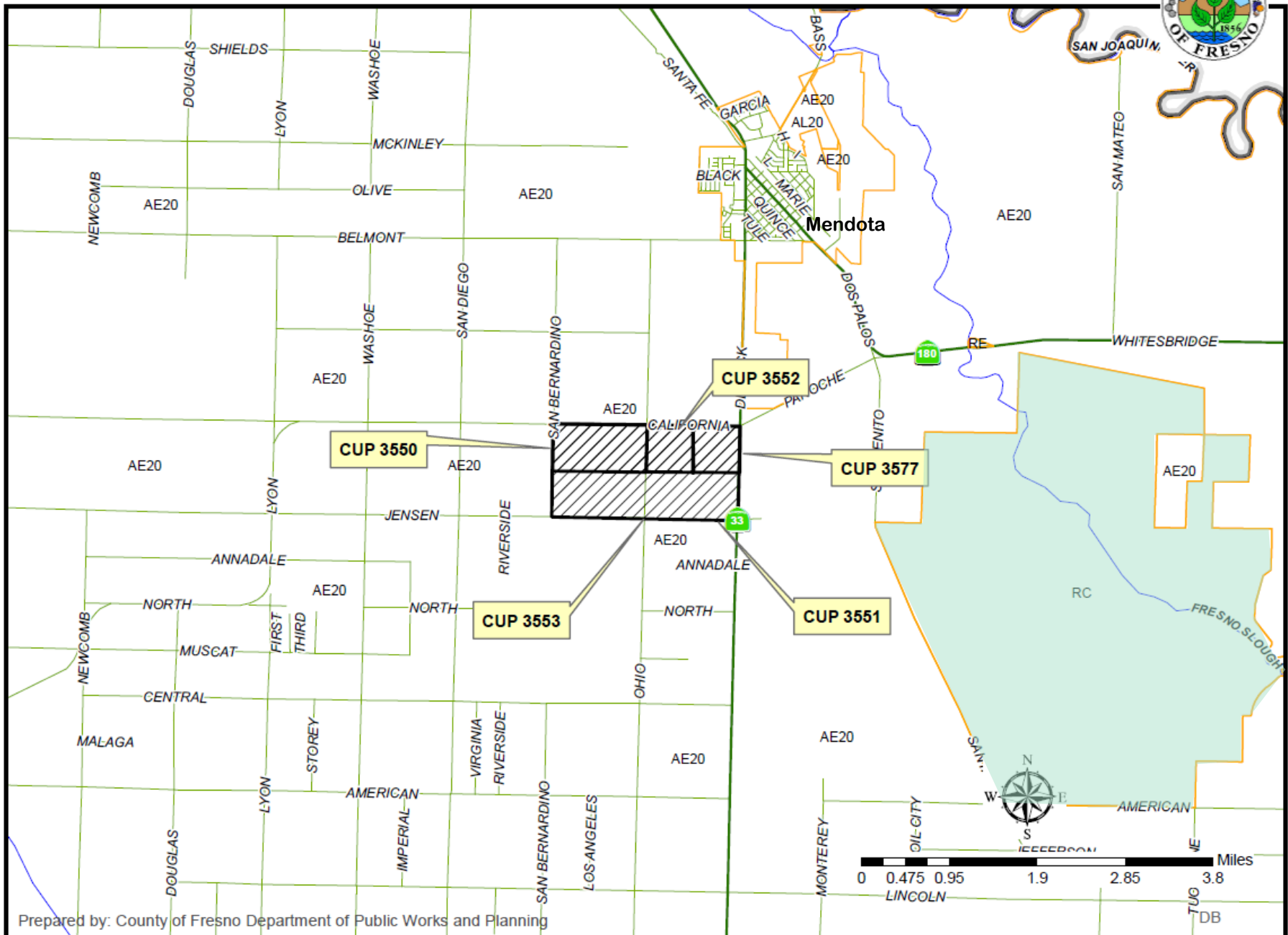
**DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC WORKS and PLANNING**  
**DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION**

**CUP 3550, 3551,  
3552, 3553, & 3577  
EIR 7225  
Little Bear Solar**

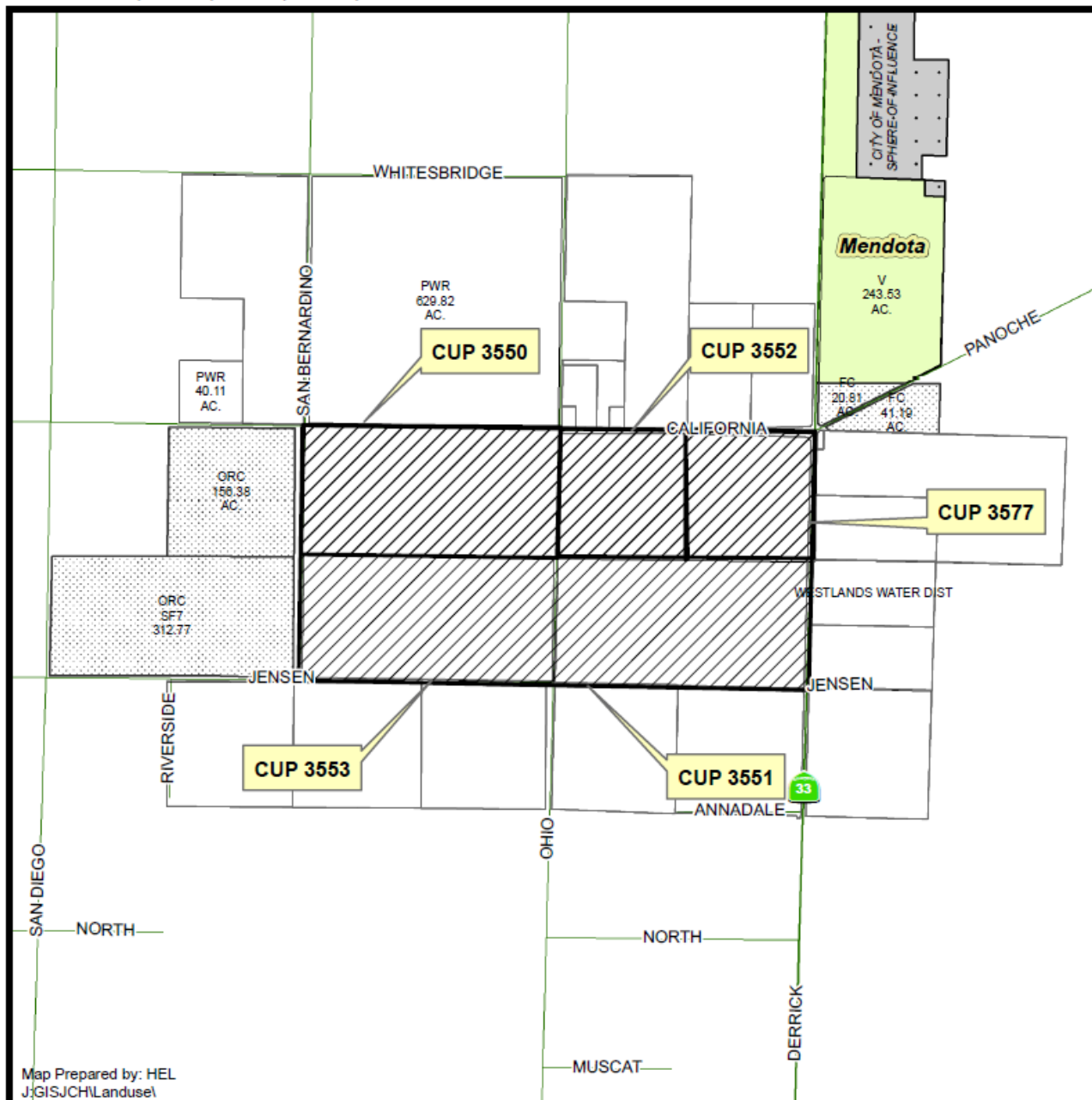
# LOCATION MAP



# EXISTING ZONING MAP



## EXISTING LAND USE MAP



## LEGEND

SF# - SINGLE FAMILY RE  
 FC - FIELD CROP  
 ORC - ORCHARD  
 PWR - POWER GENERA  
 V - VACANT

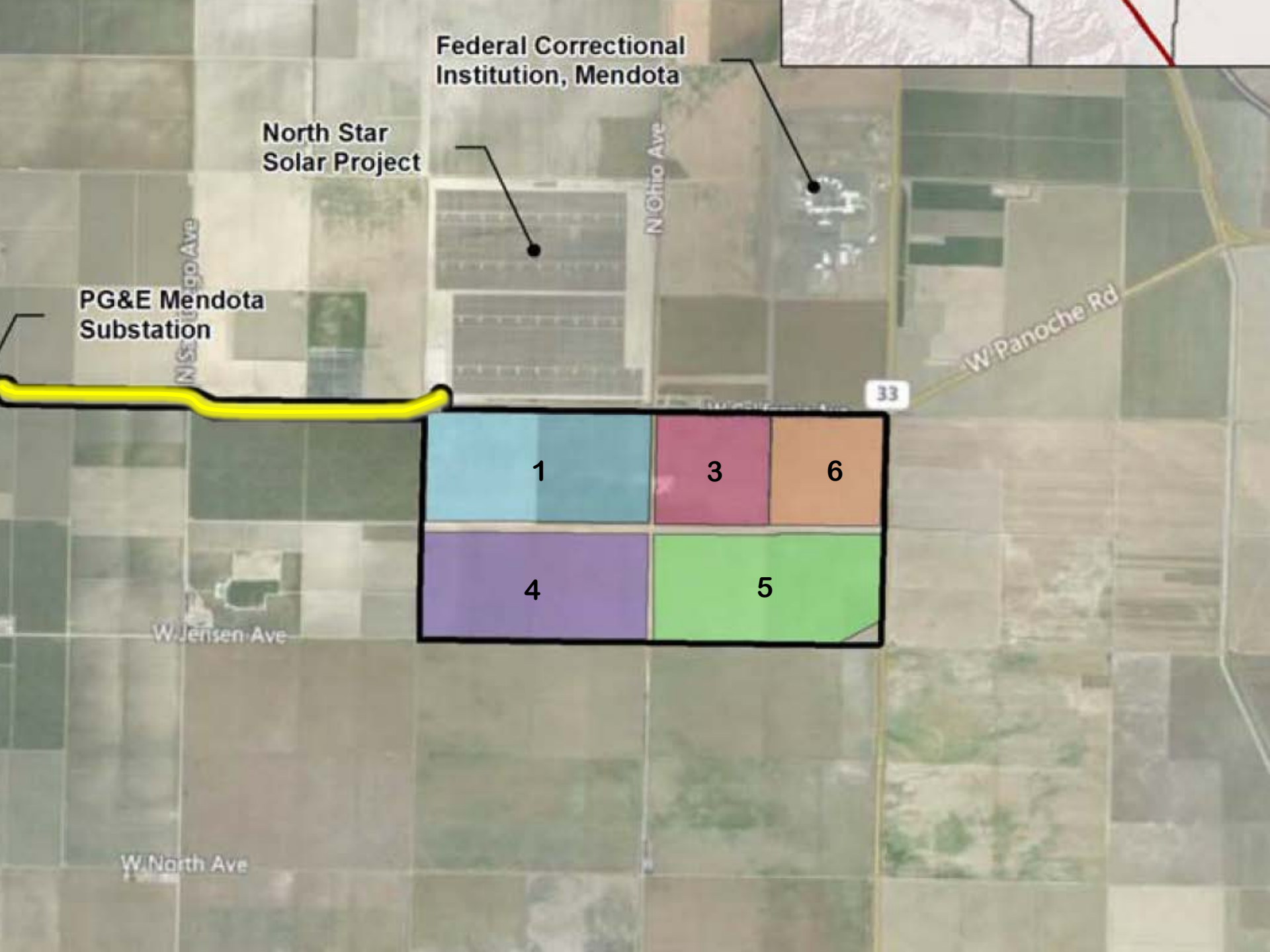
## LEGEND:

- Subject Property
- Ag Contract Land



0 800 1,600 3,200 4,800 6,400 Feet

Department of Public Works and Planning  
 Development Services Division



Federal Correctional  
Institution, Mendota

North Star  
Solar Project

PG&E Mendota  
Substation

N Seneca Ave

N Ohio Ave

W Panoche Rd

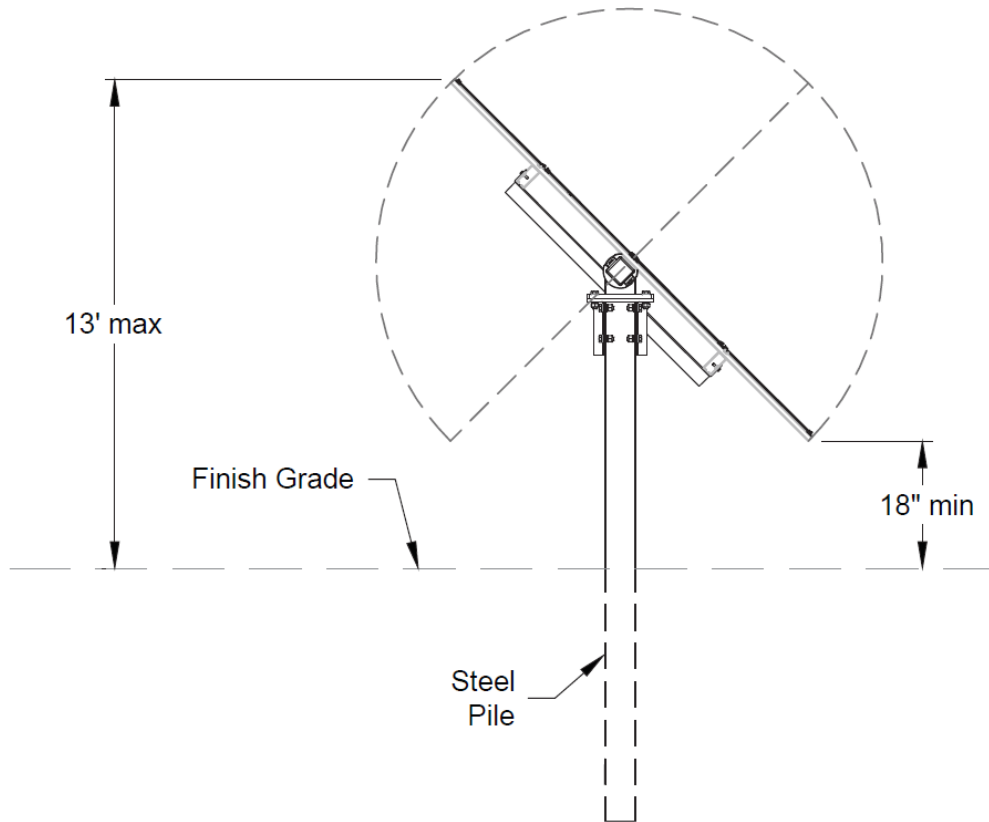
33

W Jensen Ave

W North Ave



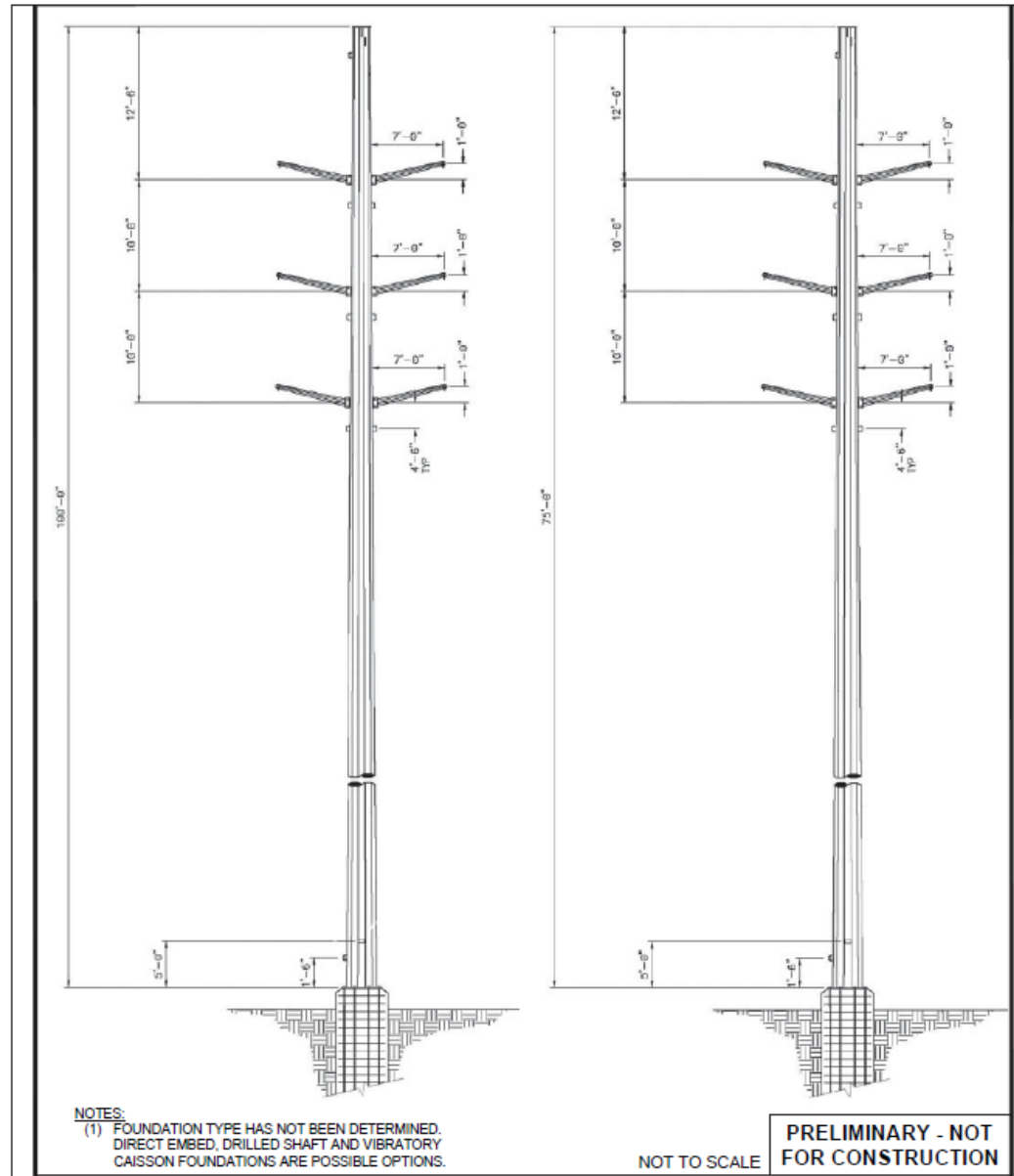
# Tracker Elevations



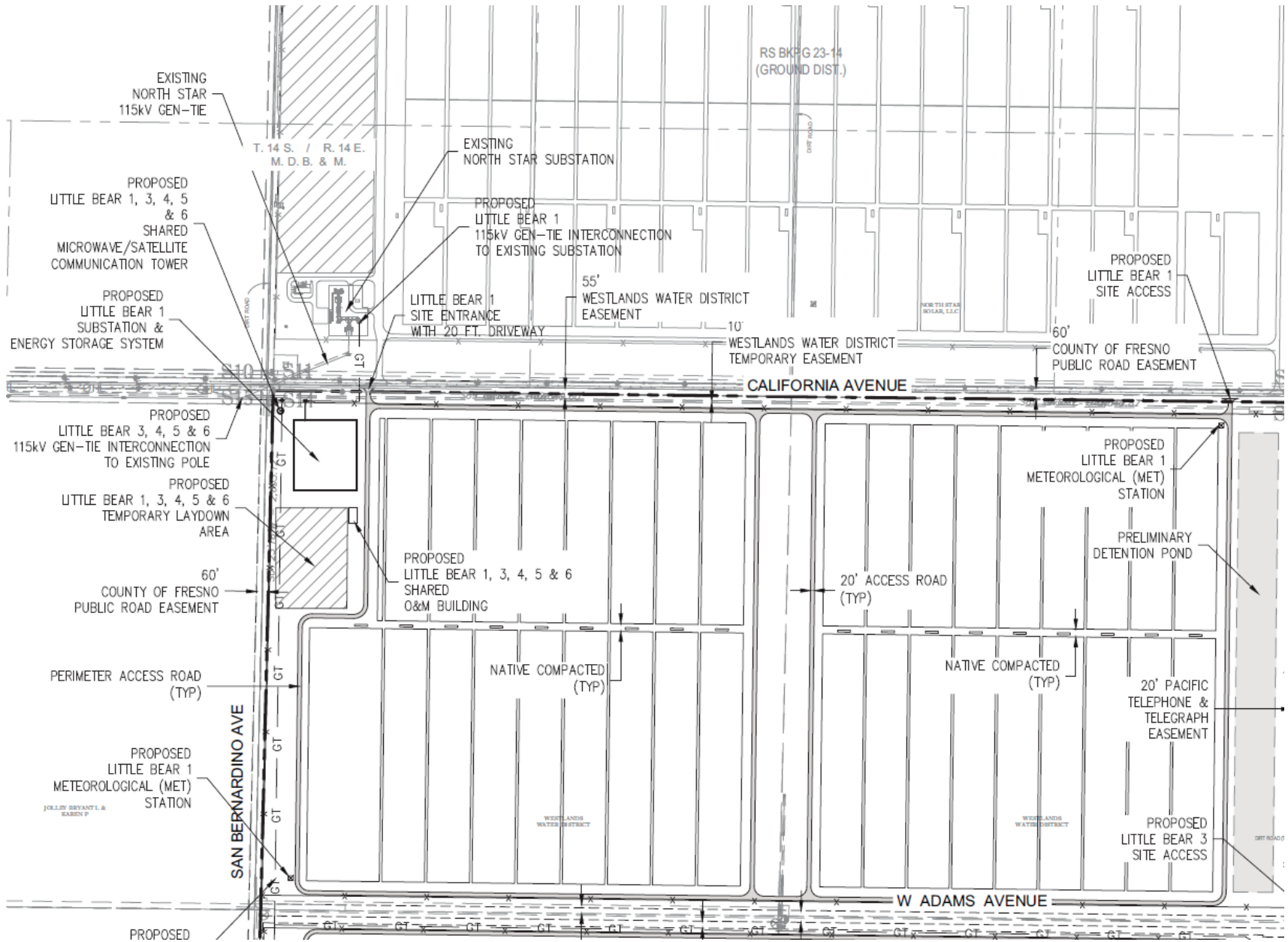
Note:

The distance from the ground to the edges of PV module table may vary depending on the topography.

# Little Bear 1 – Telecommunications Tower



# Little Bear 1 Site Plan



PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 SITE ACCESS

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

EDGE OF PAVEMENT (TYP)

10' MIN. SETBACK FROM EXISTING POWERLINE

20' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

NATIVE COMPACTED (TYP)

60' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

PRELIMINARY DETENTION POND

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 SUBSTATION & ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM

PARCEL 1 (NW 1/4, S13) 16.44 ACRES

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 4 SITE ACCESS

S OHIO AVENUE

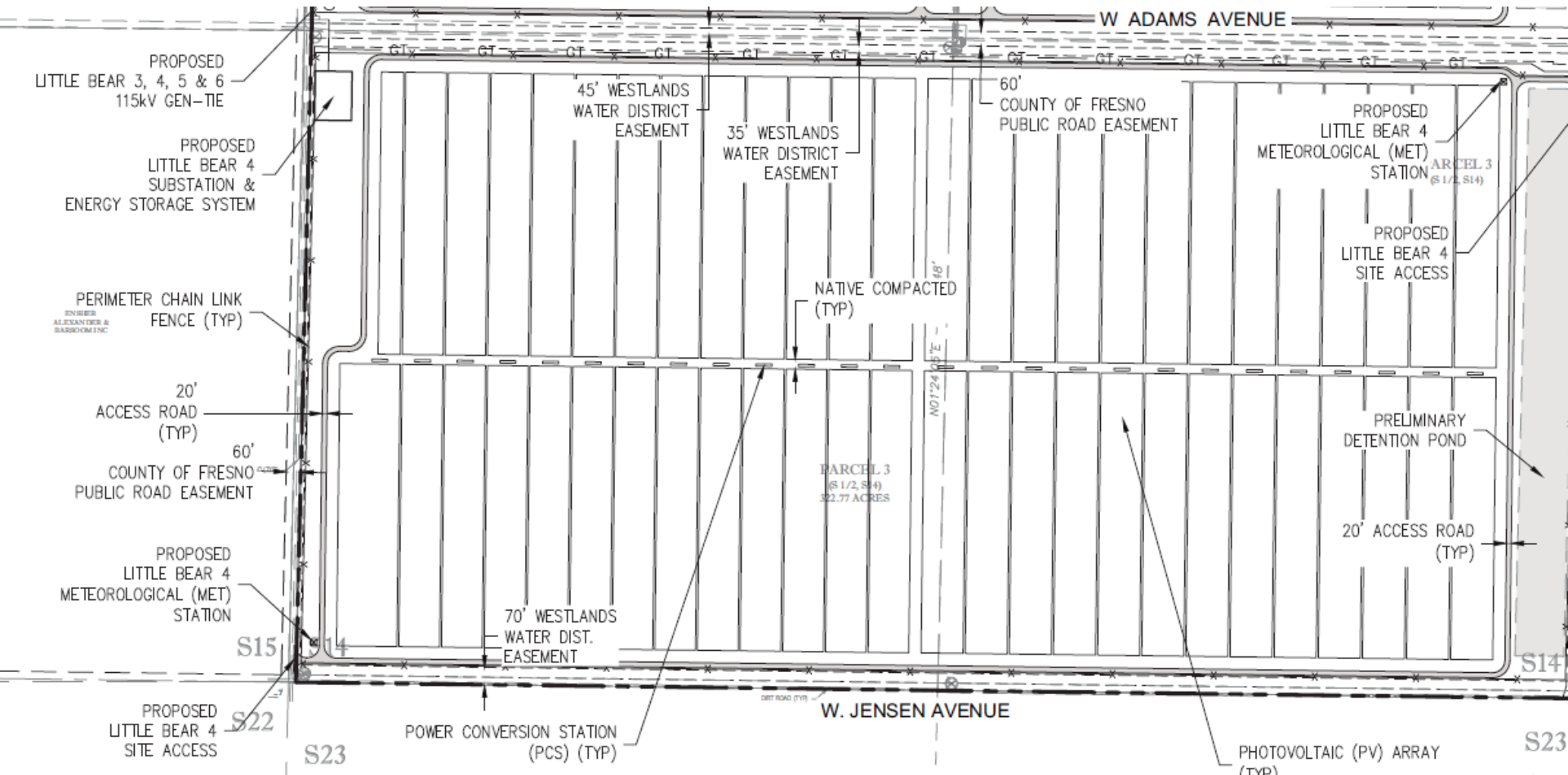
S12

EXISTING BUILDING

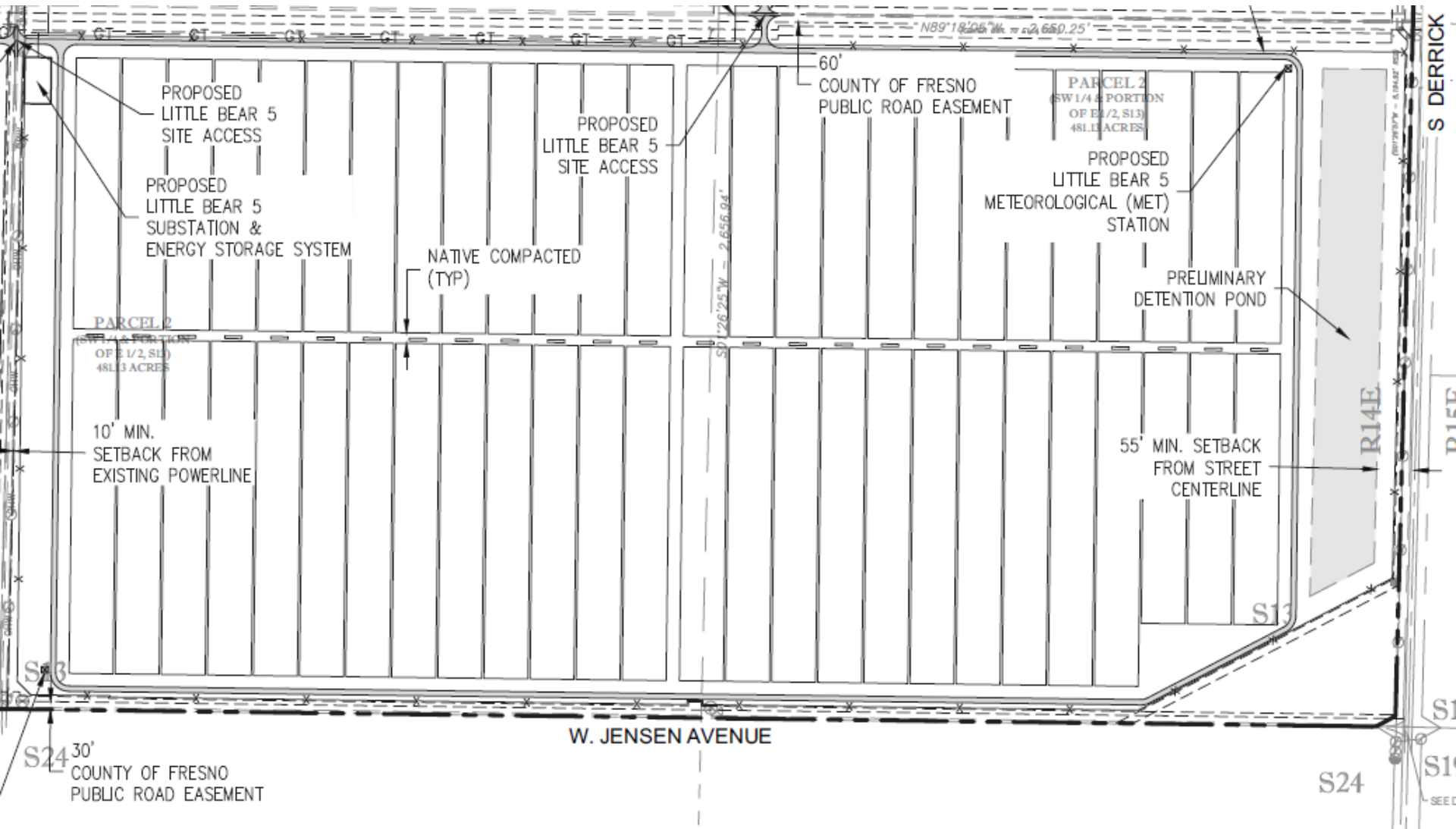
EXISTING SLOPE

GAS

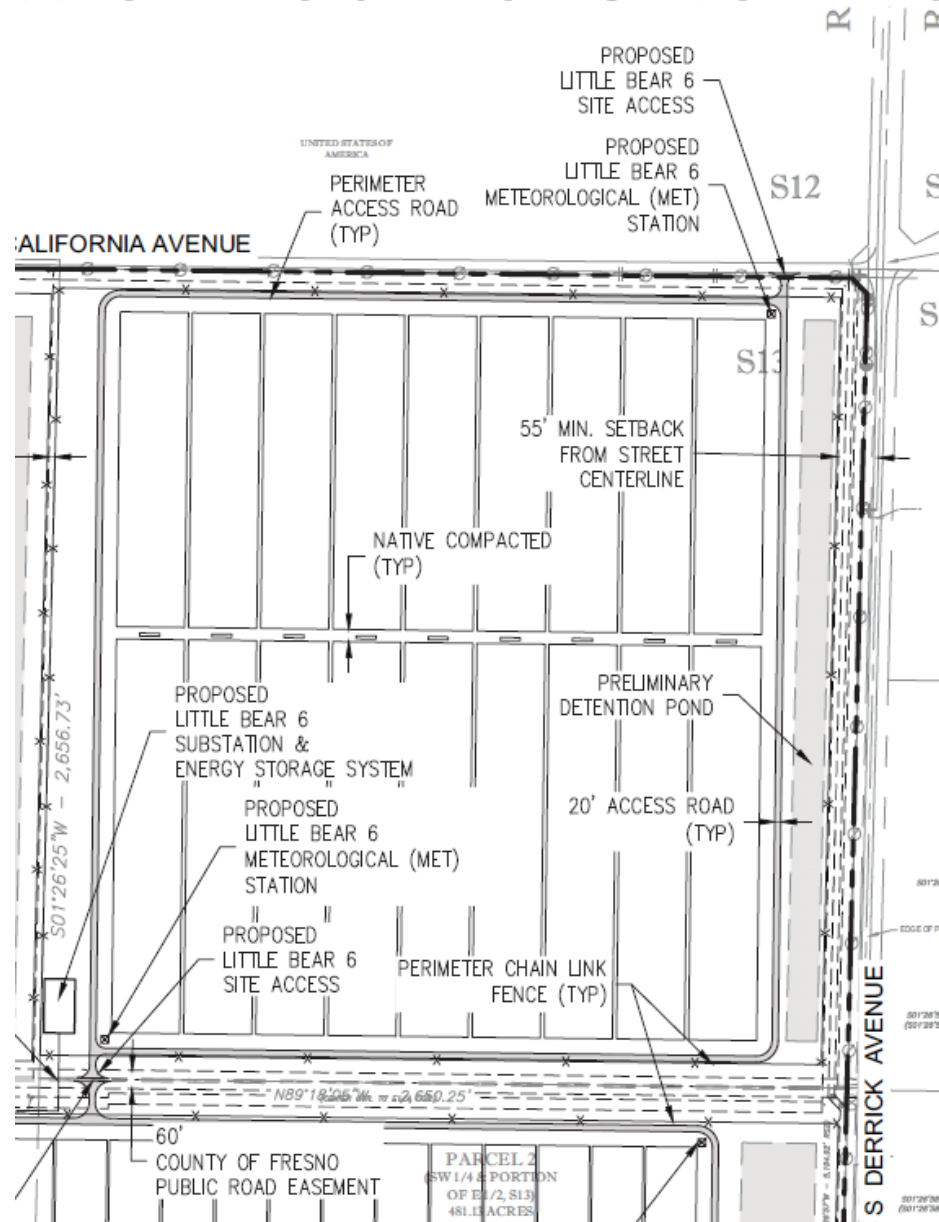
# Little Bear 4 Site Plan



# Little Bear 5 Site Plan



# Little Bear 6 Site Plan



# Project Timeline

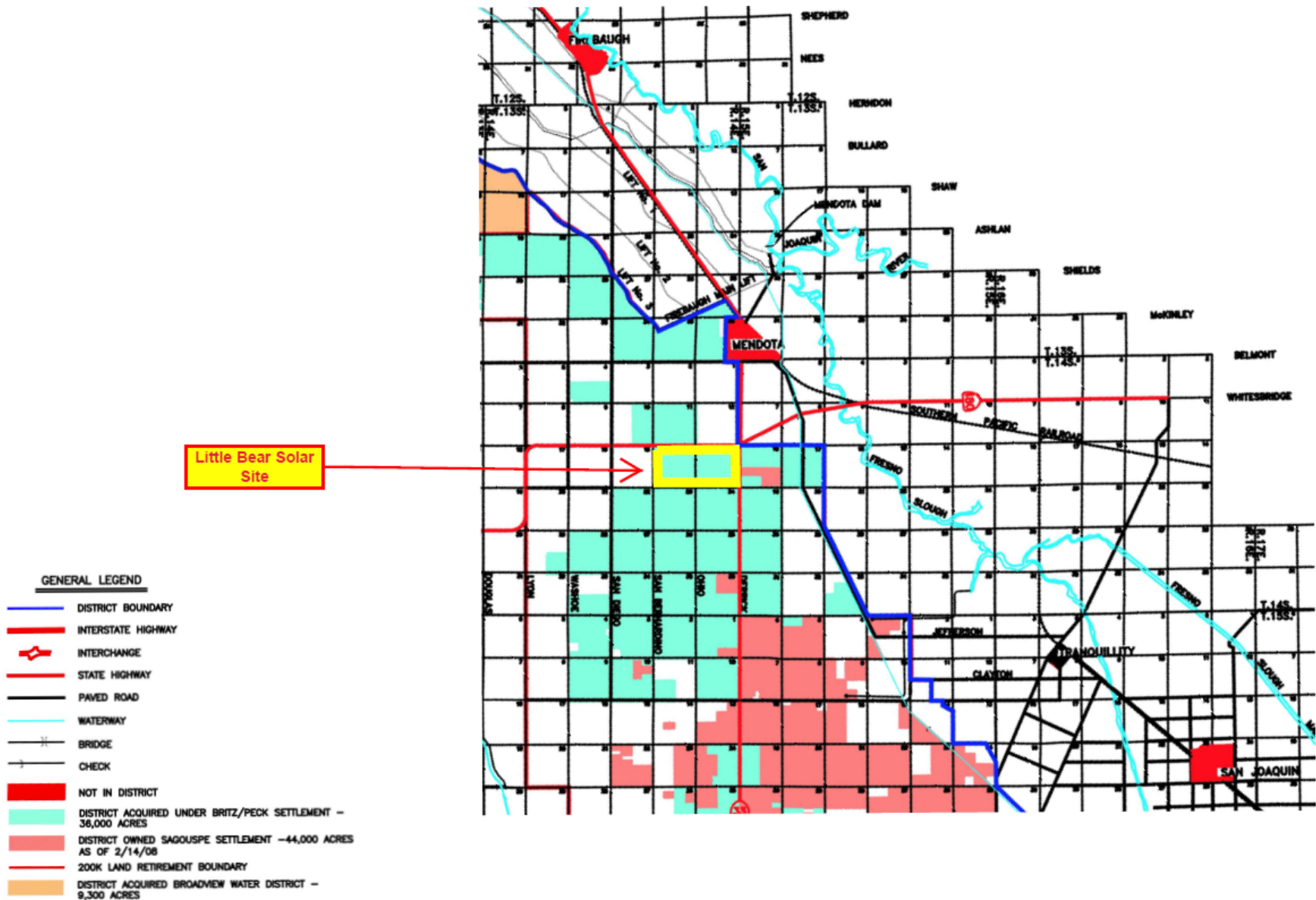
- Conditional Use Permit Applications submitted on **February 23, 2017**.
- Notice of Preparation was published on **September 7, 2017**, for a 30-day review period ending on October 9, 2017.
- Agency and Public Scoping Meeting held on **September 14, 2017**.
- A Notice of Completion for the Draft EIR was filed with the State of California Clearinghouse on **August 31, 2018**.
- A Notice of Availability of the Draft EIR was published in the Business Journal on **August 31, 2018**.
- The Draft EIR was circulated for review and comment during a 45-day period that began on **August 31, 2018**, and ended on **October 15, 2018**.
- On **October 2, 2018**, the County hosted a public meeting at the City of Mendota City Council Chambers to receive public comments.
- On **October 31, 2018**, the Final EIR was provided to agencies, organizations, and members of the public.
- On **December 6, 2018**, the Planning Commission voted (five to three, one Commissioner absent) to deny the conditional use permits.
- On **December 17, 2018** an appeal of the Planning Commission's decision was filed with the Clerk.

# FOUR FINDINGS

- Adequate Size and Shape of the parcel
- Adequacy of Streets and Highways serving the parcel
- No Adverse Effects Upon Properties surrounding the parcel
- Consistency with the General Plan

# Westlands Water District Settlement Facts

- 100,000 acres (20% of District) retired due to drainage issues;
- Preserved 700 family-owned, multi-generational farms;
- Allows Westlands to manage existing and future drainage on parcels within the District;
- Proposed to repurpose retired lands towards environmentally friendly uses, such as solar power and habitat restoration





**DEPARTMENT of PUBLIC WORKS and PLANNING**  
**DEVELOPMENT SERVICES DIVISION**

**CUP 3550, 3551,  
3552, 3553, & 3577  
EIR 7225  
Little Bear Solar**

# Recommended Motions (Denial)

- Conditional Use Permits
- Deny the appeal of the Planning Commission's December 6, 2018 decision; and
- Determine that the required findings for the granting of Unclassified Conditional Use Permit Nos. 3550, 3551, 3552, 3553, and 3570 cannot be made.

and/or

- Environmental Impact Report
- Determine that the project as proposed would have one or more significant effects on the environment (state the effects); and
- Direct staff to revise Environmental Impact Report No. 7225;
- Move to continue the public hearing of Conditional Use Permit Nos. 3350, 3551, 3552, 3553, and 3570 and Environmental Impact Report No. 7225 to a date uncertain following recirculation of the Final EIR.

# Recommended Motions (Approval)

- Approve the appeal based on Department staff's analysis found in Attachment D; and
- overturn the Planning Commission's denial of the project

## **In its motion to approve, the Board must:**

- include the manner in which the required findings must be made,
- adopt the CEQA Findings of Fact; and
- certify EIR No. 7225 as complete and adequate in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

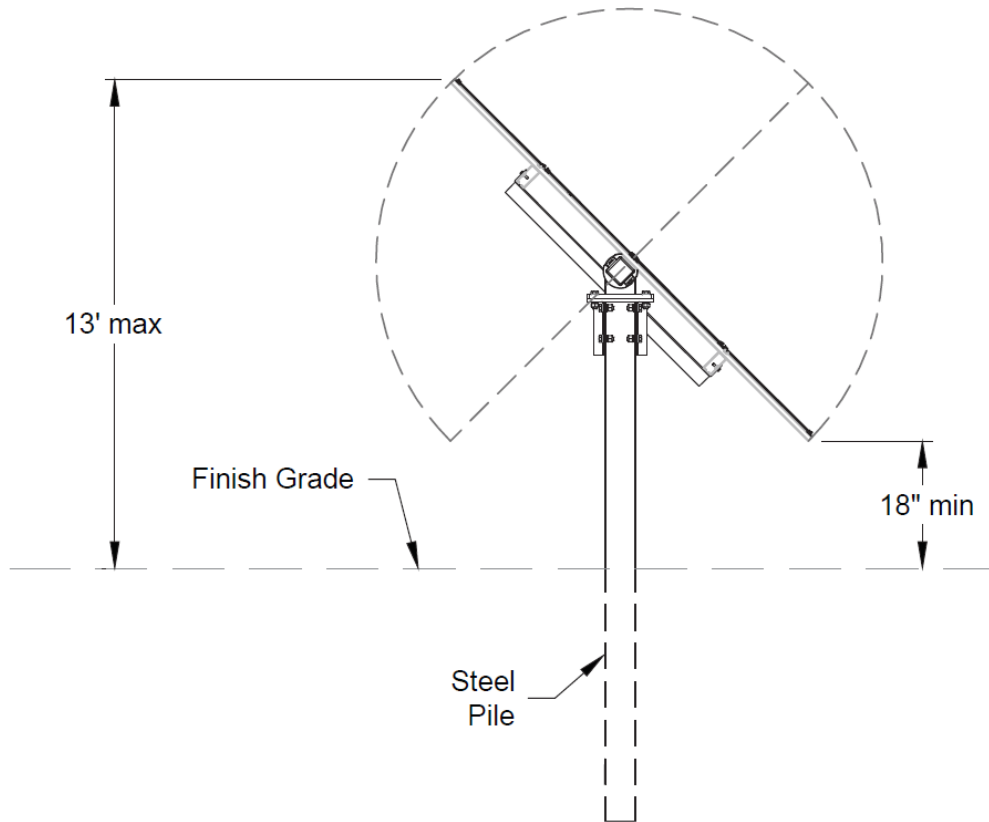
(See next slide)

# Recommended Conditions of Approval

- The Applicant shall enter into an agreement indemnifying the County for all legal costs associated with its approval of UCUPS 3550-3553, and 3570 and provide a bond in the amount of \$150,000.00 as security for any such legal costs incurred by the County.
- The Applicant shall enter into a Reclamation Agreement prior to issuance of construction-related permits and shall have the property owner execute a limited easement for the County's benefit.

# Site Plans and Elevations

# Tracker Elevations



Note:

The distance from the ground to the edges of PV module table may vary depending on the topography.

130'-0"

10'-0"

10'-0"

10'-0"

4'-6"

1'-0"

7'-0"

7'-0"

7'-0"

1'-0"

1'-0"

1'-0"

75'-0"

10'-0"

10'-0"

10'-0"

4'-6"

1'-0"

7'-0"

7'-0"

7'-0"

1'-0"

1'-0"

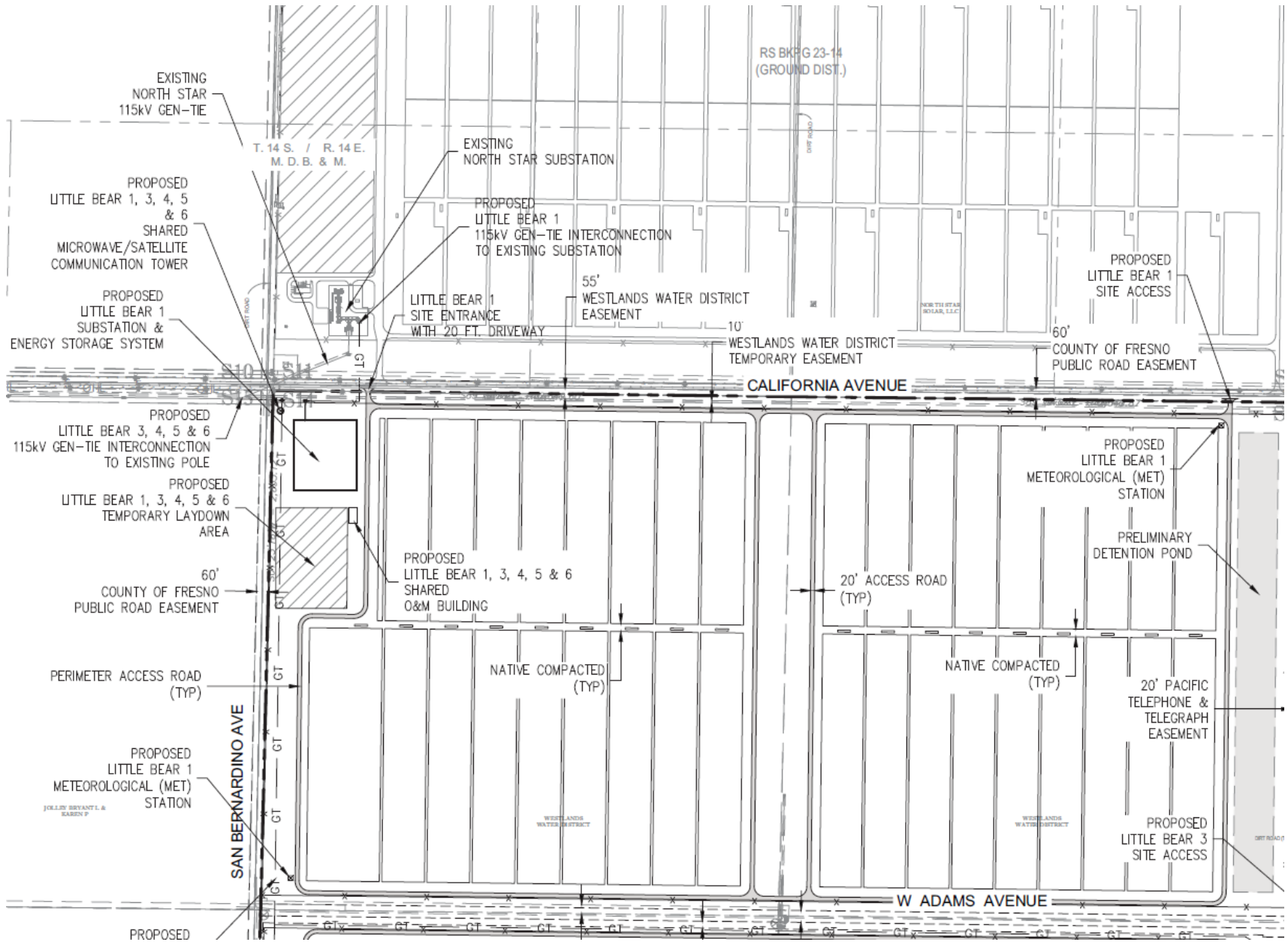
1'-0"

NOT TO SCALE

PRELIMINARY - NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

NOTES:  
(1) FOUNDATION TYPE HAS NOT BEEN DETERMINED. DIRECT EMBED, DRILLED SHAFT AND VIBRATORY CAISSON FOUNDATIONS ARE POSSIBLE OPTIONS.

# Little Bear 1



PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 SITE ACCESS

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

EDGE OF PAVEMENT (TYP)

10' MIN. SETBACK FROM EXISTING POWERLINE

20' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

NATIVE COMPACTED (TYP)

60' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 SUBSTATION & ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM

PARCEL 1 (NW 1/4, S13) 16.64 ACRES

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 3 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

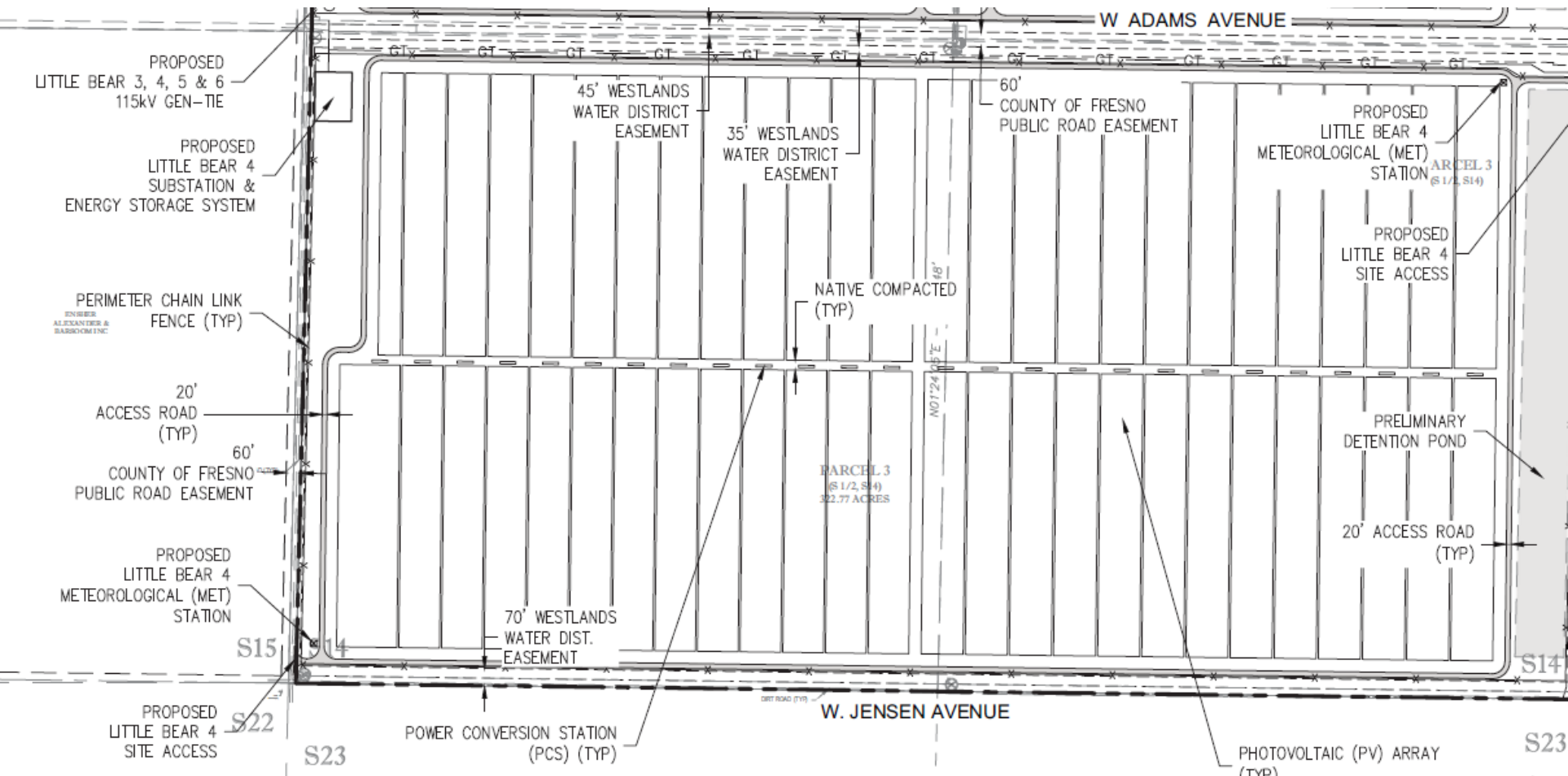
PRELIMINARY DETENTION POND

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 4 SITE ACCESS

S OHIO AVENUE

S OHIO AVENUE

# Little Bear 4



PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 5 SITE ACCESS

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 5 SUBSTATION & ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 5 SITE ACCESS

NATIVE COMPACTED (TYP)

60' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

PARCEL 2 (SW 1/4 & PORTION OF E 1/2, S13) 481.13 ACRES

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 5 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

PRELIMINARY DETENTION POND

10' MIN. SETBACK FROM EXISTING POWERLINE

55' MIN. SETBACK FROM STREET CENTERLINE

W. JENSEN AVENUE

S24

S25

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SEE D

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CALIFORNIA AVENUE

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 6 SITE ACCESS

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 6 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

S12

PERIMETER ACCESS ROAD (TYP)

55' MIN. SETBACK FROM STREET CENTERLINE

NATIVE COMPACTED (TYP)

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 6 SUBSTATION & ENERGY STORAGE SYSTEM

PRELIMINARY DETENTION POND

20' ACCESS ROAD (TYP)

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 6 METEOROLOGICAL (MET) STATION

PROPOSED LITTLE BEAR 6 SITE ACCESS

PERIMETER CHAIN LINK FENCE (TYP)

S13

60' COUNTY OF FRESNO PUBLIC ROAD EASEMENT

PARCEL 2 (SW 1/4 OF S13) 48.13 ACRES

S DERRICK AVENUE

## Site Plan

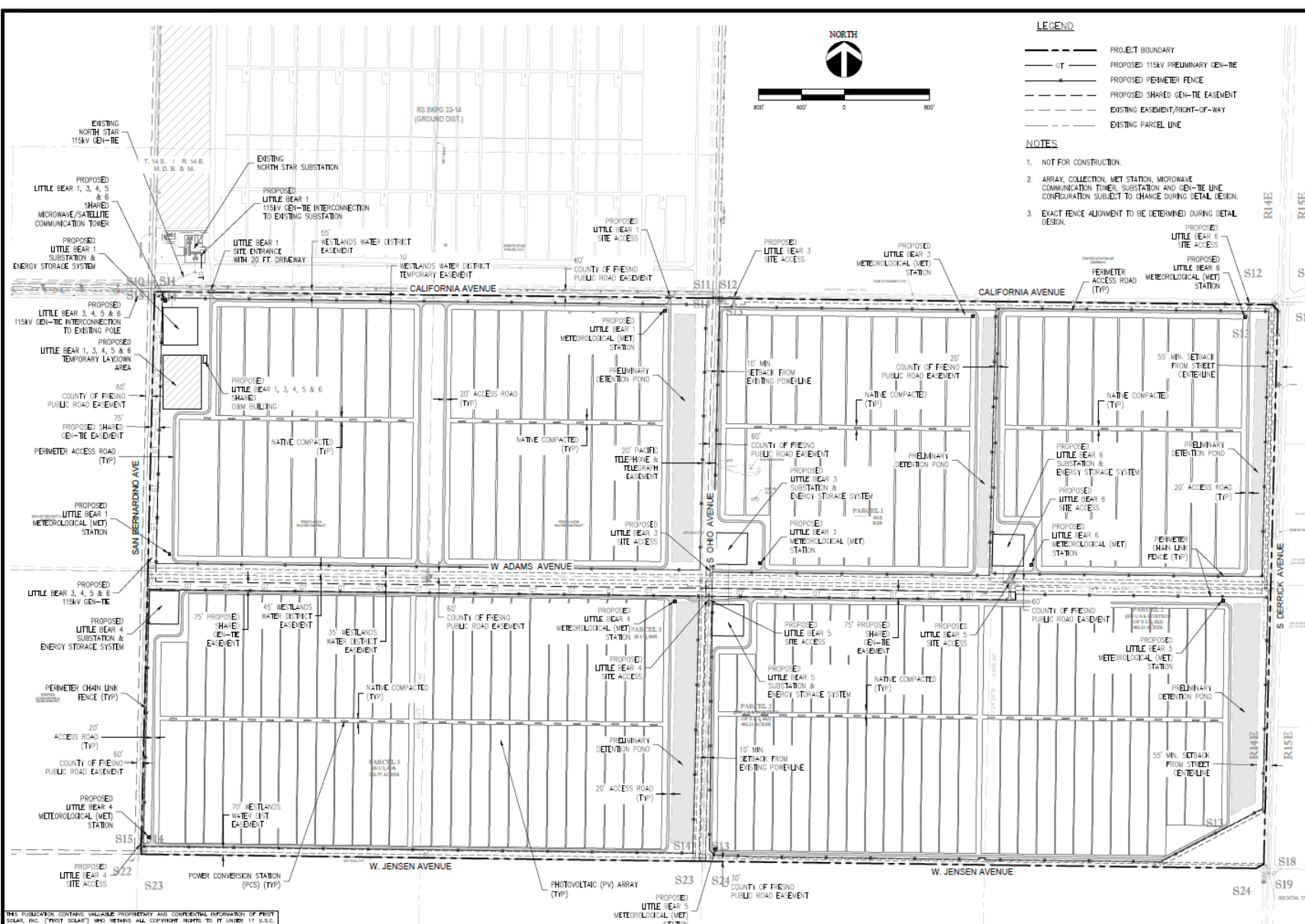


**LITTLE BEAR 1, 3, 4, 5 & 6**  
SOLAR  
MENDOTA, FRESNO COUNTY  
CALIFORNIA  
180MWac

FS JOB #  
PROJ. DENT. ENR: A. ACEVEDO-CROSS  
PROJ. MGR.  
SCALE: 1"=600' @ 24"x36" SHEET  
COPYRIGHT BY: FIRST SOLAR, INC.  
SHEET 112

SITE PLAN  
(6/27/17)

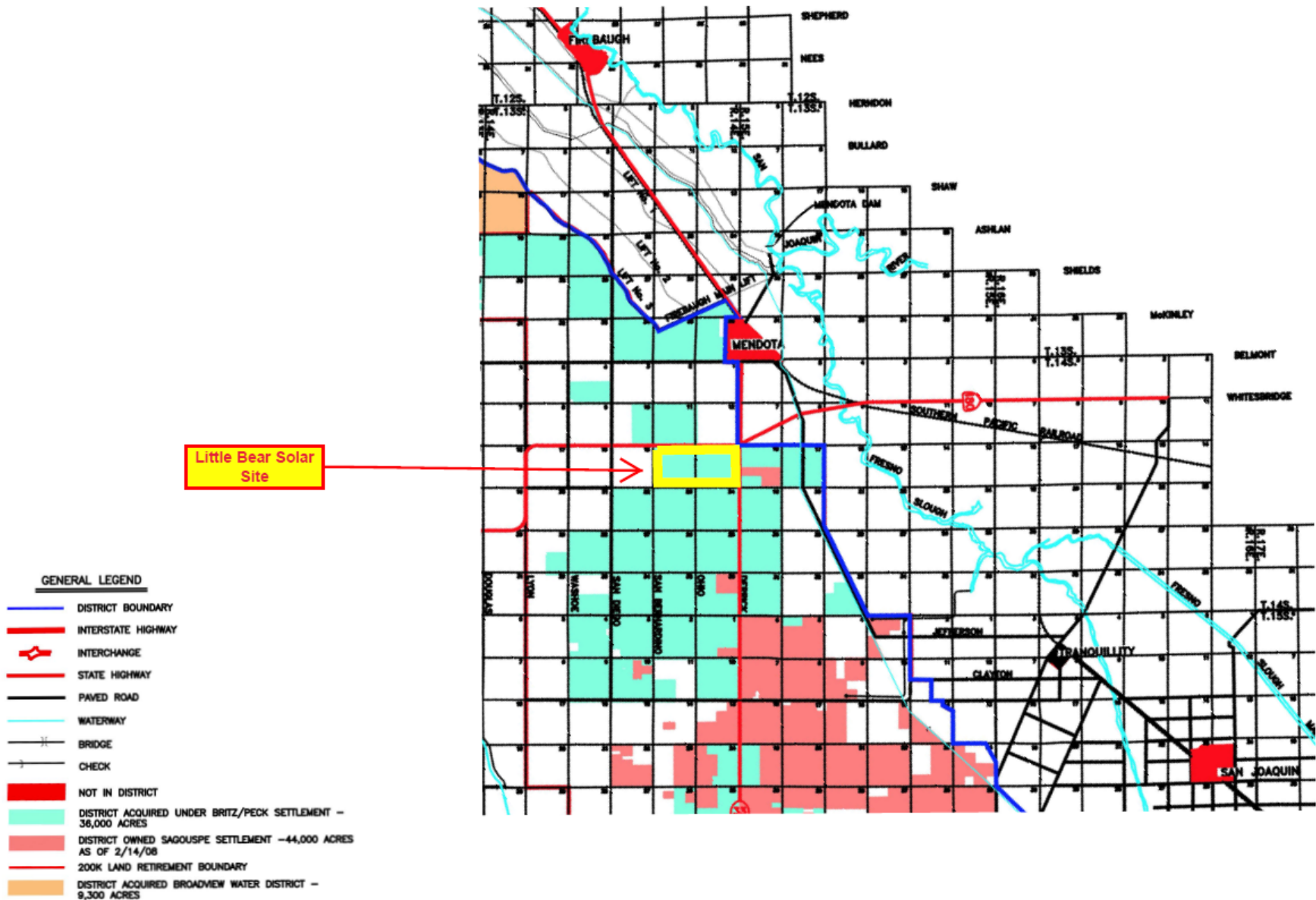
SHEET 1 OF 1

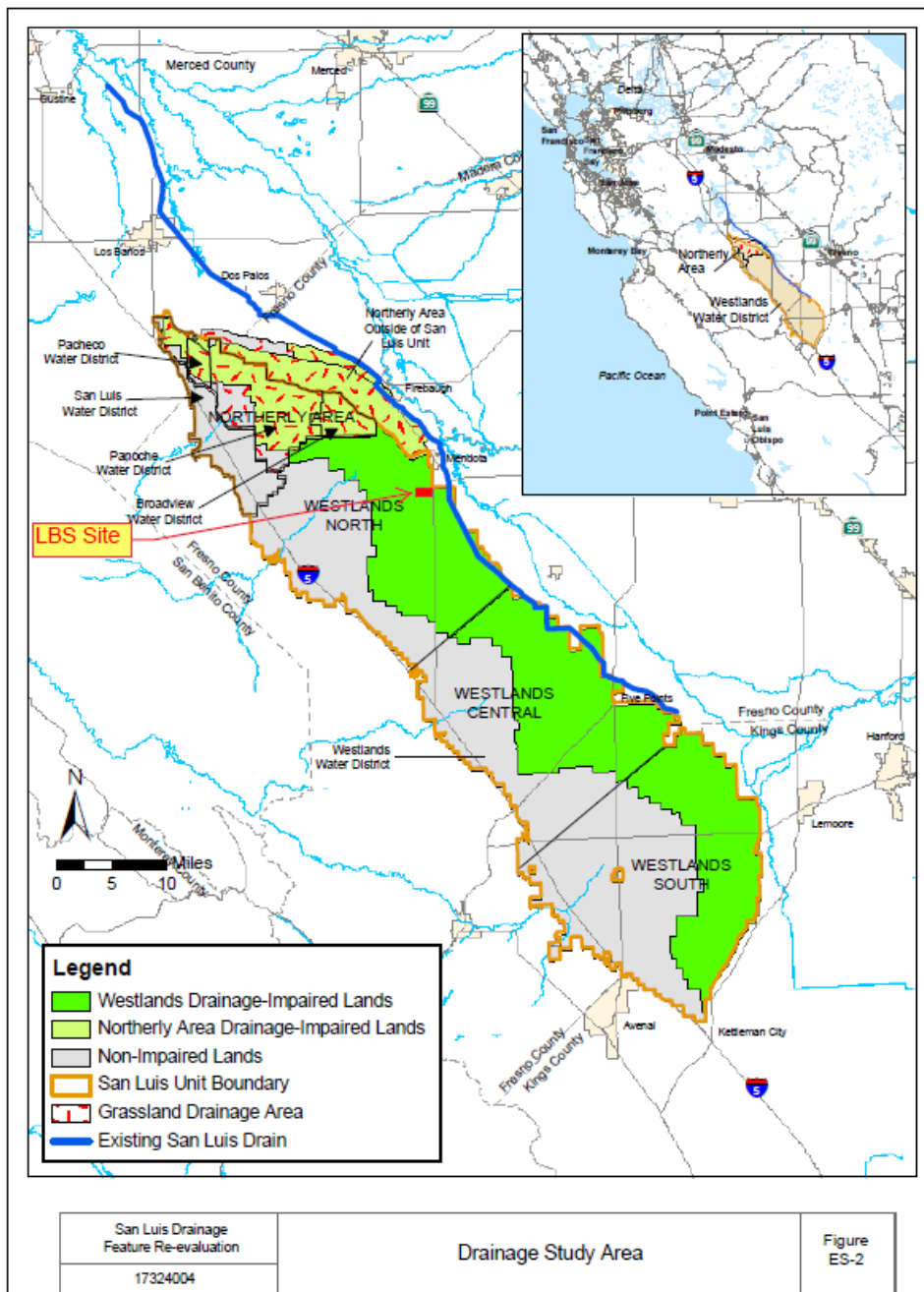


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AND SIGNED OK FOR CONSTRUCTION ABOVE LAST REVISION.

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# Westlands Water District Maps







# Site Photos and Key Observation Points







KOP 1: View east from residences near W California Ave and N San Diego Ave showing existing North Star gen-tie line agricultural fields.



KOP 2: View northeast from Project's northwest corner on W California Ave and San Bernadino Ave showing North Star Substation and PV facility.

D:\00033.00 - First Solar Little Bear\05 Graphics-GIS-Modeling\Illustrator



KOP 3: View southwest from W California Ave showing existing agricultural land uses and structures on Project site in the foreground and the Diablo Range in the background.



KOP 4: View northeast from W California Ave showing FCI Mendota in the foreground and the City of Mendota in the background.

SAFARI PHOTOGRAPHY © 2018. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. NO PART OF THIS PUBLICATION MAY BE REPRODUCED OR TRANSMITTED IN ANY FORM OR BY ANY MEANS, ELECTRONIC OR MECHANICAL, WITHOUT PERMISSION IN WRITING FROM SAFARI PHOTOGRAPHY.



KOP 5: View from W Panoche Rd. and S Derrick Ave. showing the Project site in the foreground and the Diablo Range in the background.



KOP 6: View north from W Jensen Ave near S Ohio Ave showing the Project site and existing structures in the foreground and the North Star Solar Facility and FCI Mendota in the background.



KOP 7: View east from W Jensen Ave near S Ohio Ave showing a typical unimproved road between fallow agricultural fields near Project's southern boundary.



KOP 8: View northwest from W North Ave near an unnamed road showing the Project site in the middle ground and the North Star Solar gen-tie line along the horizon.

D:\60035.00 - First Solar Little Bear\05 Graphics-GIS Modeling\Illustrator



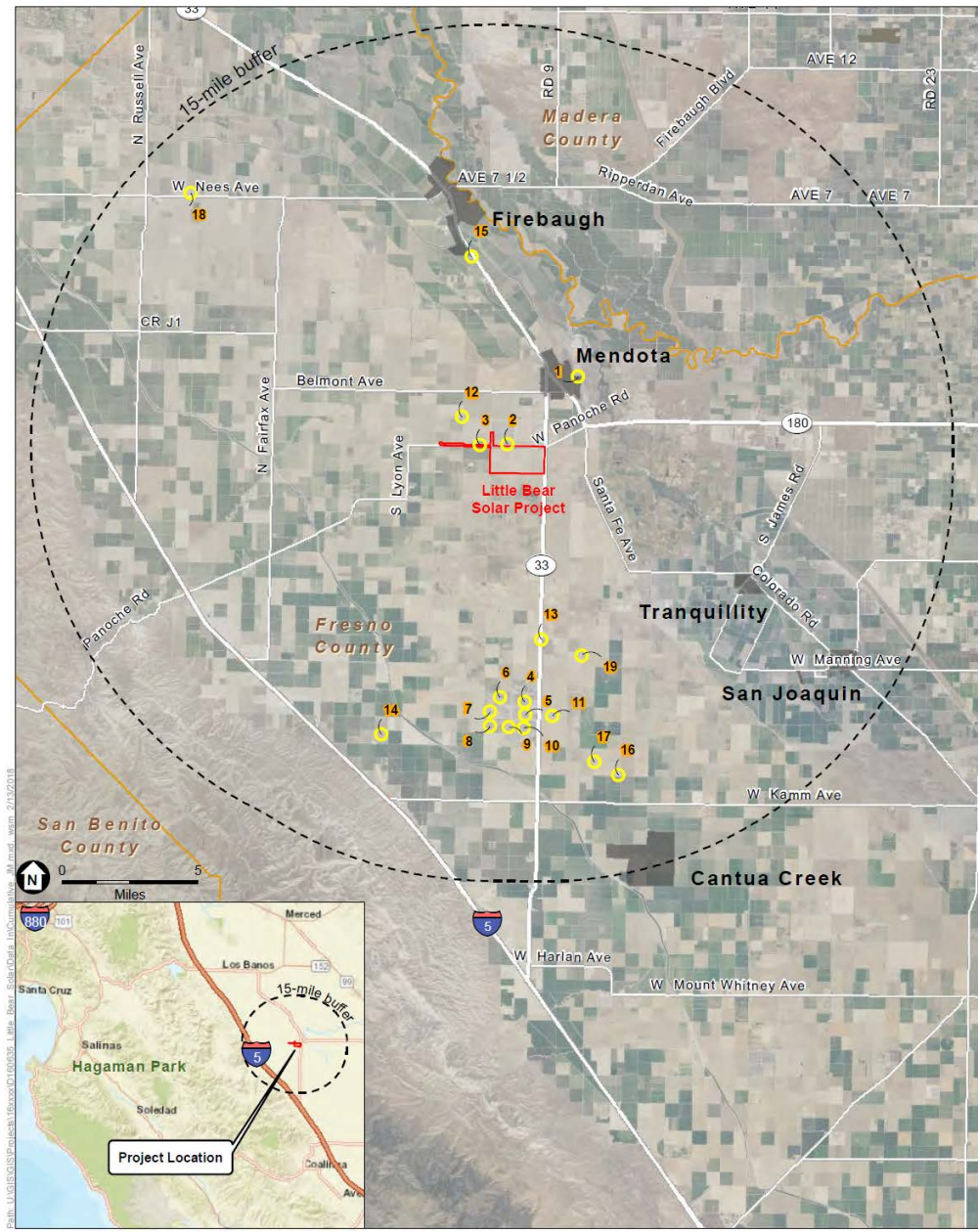
KOP 9: Views west from the Project site's western border showing adjacent pomegranate fields in the foreground and the Diablo Range in the background.



KOP 10: Views northwest from the Project site's western border showing the Project site in the foreground and the North Star Solar Project, FCI Mendota, and the City of Mendota in the background.

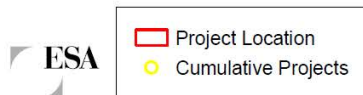
KOP 9: Views west from the Project site's western border showing adjacent pomegranate fields in the foreground and the Diablo Range in the background.

# Noise, CNDDDB, Cumulative Projects Maps



SOURCE: ESRI (2018); ESA (2018)

Little Bear Solar Project



**Figure 3.1-1**  
Potentially Cumulative Projects within  
15-miles of the Little Bear Solar Site

