

4. Environmental Impact Assessment

4.11 Mineral Resources

This section describes the mineral resources in the Proposed Project area and describes the affected environment and regulatory setting. Potential impacts are also described.

4.11.1 Environmental Setting

The Proposed Project is located within portions of the Indian Wells Valley and Searles Valley physiographic regions. Earth materials to a depth of approximately 1,300 feet are composed of various unconsolidated alluvial, lacustrine, playa, and aeolian deposits. Consolidated sedimentary, igneous, and metamorphic rocks underlie the unconsolidated materials throughout the Proposed Project area.

According to the California Department of Conservation Division of Oil, Gas, and Geothermal Resources, no oil and gas exploration has been conducted within or in the vicinity of the Proposed Project area (CDC 2010).

The Searles Lake evaporate deposits are actively mined for potash and other natural resources immediately east of the Searles and McGen Substations and portions of the Inyokern-McGen-Searles No. 1 and No. 2 115 kV subtransmission line ROWs within Searles Valley. Kern County has issued active mining permits for sand and gravel at the Bowman and Potlach mines west of the Proposed Project area and for aggregate at the Sand Canyon mine northwest of the Proposed Project area. Abandoned gold mining operations are located southeast of Ridgecrest along Highway 14. Other mineral resources mined in the area include bentonite. Numerous abandoned exploration pits and quarries exist in the general vicinity of Ridgecrest (Kern County 2010).

The Kern County General Plan establishes guidelines to ensure the availability of mineral and petroleum resources for future production by establishing areas that are limited to activities directly associated with resource extraction (Kern County 2007). No designated mineral or petroleum resource development areas are located within or near the Proposed Project area. The City of Ridgecrest General Plan (2008) does not establish mining or quarrying as potential land uses within the City and does not include policies or goals specifically concerning these types of activities.

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4.11.2 Regulatory Setting

4.11.2.1 Federal

Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977—This Act establishes a program for regulating surface coal mining and reclamation activities. It establishes mandatory uniform standards for these activities on state and federal lands, including a requirement that adverse impacts on fish, wildlife and related environmental values be minimized. The Act creates an Abandoned Mine Reclamation Fund for use in reclaiming and restoring land and water resources adversely affected by mining practices.

4.11.2.2 State

California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act—The protection of regionally significant mineral resource deposits is one of the main emphases of the California Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA). The law specifically mandates a two-phased process, commonly referred to as classification and designation, for mineral resources. The California Geological Survey is responsible under SMARA for carrying out the classification phase of the process. The California Mining and Geology Board is responsible for the second phase, which allows the Board to designate areas within a production-consumption region that contain significant deposits of certain mineral resources that may be needed to meet the region's future demand.

SMARA requires the State Geologist to classify lands into Mineral Resource Zones (MRZ) based on the known or inferred mineral resource potential of that land. The classification process is based solely on geology, without regard to land use or ownership. The primary goal of mineral land classification is to help ensure that the mineral resource potential of lands is recognized and considered in the land use planning process. The MRZ categories are described below:

- MRZ-1: Areas where adequate information indicates that no significant mineral deposits are present or where it is judged that little likelihood exists for their presence.
- MRZ-2: Areas where adequate information indicates significant mineral deposits are present or where it is judged that a high likelihood exists for their presence.
- MRZ-3: Areas containing mineral deposits, the significance of which cannot be evaluated from available data.
- MRZ-4: Areas where available information is inadequate for assignment to any other MRZ.

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MRZ information for the Proposed Project area is unavailable. The U.S. Geological Survey's "Mineral Resource Data System" indicates the nearest mineral resources to the Proposed Project are those currently mined by Argus Evaporators and the Trona Plant (USGS 2010). Other resources (boron/borates and mercury) are associated with China Lake, approximately five miles to the north of the existing Downs Substation.

4.11.2.3 Local

There are no local regulations applicable to the Proposed Project.

4.11.3 Significance Criteria

The significance criteria for assessing the impacts to Mineral Resources come from the CEQA Environmental Checklist. A project causes a potentially significant impact if it would:

- Result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state; or
- Result in the loss of the availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan.

4.11.4 Impact Assessment

Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would result in no impacts for the following CEQA criteria:

Would the Proposed Project result in the loss of availability of a known mineral resource that would be of value to the region and the residents of the state?

No Impact. The availability of Searles Lake evaporate mineral deposits would not be adversely impacted by the Proposed Project. No mining activities are currently conducted at the location of the proposed Downs Substation expansion or within the 115 kV subtransmission line ROWs. Construction and operation of the Proposed Project would not prevent future access to any mineral resources that may be located along the ROWs.

Construction and operation of the proposed Downs Substation expansion would preclude surface mineral extraction activities at the location. However, mining is not established as a potential land use within the City of Ridgecrest, and there is no indication that a mineral resource of any value is located under the proposed Downs Substation expansion area. Therefore, the Proposed Project

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would not result in the loss of mineral and other natural resources that would be of value to the region or residents of the State. No impacts would occur under this criterion as a result of the Proposed Project.

Would the Proposed Project result in the loss of the availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

No Impact. No locally-important mineral resource recovery sites other than the Searles Lake evaporate deposits occur within the vicinity of the Proposed Project. Therefore, because no impacts to the availability of the Searles Lake mineral resources would occur, no impacts would occur under this criterion as a result of the Proposed Project.

4.11.5 Applicant Proposed Measures

Because the Proposed Project would result in no impacts to mineral resources, no Applicant Proposed Measures are offered.

REFERENCES

California Department of Conservation (CDC) Division of Oil, Gas, & Geothermal Resources. 2010. Online Well Record Search. [Online Resource] Available at: <http://owr.conservaion.ca.gov/WellSearch/WellSearch.aspx>. Accessed June 18, 2010.

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