CHAPTER 6 OTHER CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter summarizes the information presented in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to address the broader questions posed by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, Section 15126.2. This chapter addresses significant impacts from the JVR Energy Park Project (Proposed Project) that cannot be mitigated to less than significant, significant, significant irreversible environmental changes, and growth-inducing impacts.

6.1 Significant Environmental Impacts of the Project That Cannot Be Mitigated to Less Than Significant

Table ES-1, Summary of Significant Effects (within the Executive Summary of this EIR), summarizes the results of the environmental analysis completed for the Proposed Project. Mitigation measures have been identified to reduce environmental impacts associated with aesthetics, air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geotechnical, soil and seismicity, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, noise, paleontological resources, tribal cultural resources, and wildfire. These mitigation measures are included in Table ES-2. Mitigation measures would reduce potentially significant impacts to less than significant for all impacts except for aesthetics and mineral resources. Mitigation measures were considered in attempting to reduce impacts to below a level of significance for aesthetics, but the impacts listed below would remain significant and unavoidable. There are no feasible mitigation measures to reduce the impacts of mineral resources to less than significant. A detailed analysis of significant environmental effects, mitigation measures, and infeasible mitigation measures is provided throughout Chapter 2 of this EIR.

The following significant environmental impacts of the Project cannot be mitigated to less than significant:

- Aesthetics: Impacts AE-1, AE-2, AE-3, AE-4, AE-5, AE-6, AE-7, AE-8, AE-9, AE-CU-1, and AE-CU-2
- Mineral Resources: Impact MR-1

Aesthetics

Impact AE-1

Under Aesthetics Threshold 1, Existing Visual Character and/or Quality, the proposed theme and style of Proposed Project development (i.e., solar energy development) would not be consistent with the undeveloped, desert landscape and small-town character of Jacumba. The wide distribution of repeating rows of solar panels on the approximately 643-acre site would create noticeable horizontal scale and massing contrasts with adjacent areas of residential development.

In addition, the Proposed Project would install thousands of uniformly dark solar panels (and potentially light-colored inverters, battery energy storage system containers, and reflective transmission line conductor) to an area that consists mostly of earth tones, modest and lightly colored residential structures, and undeveloped lands. Thus, the color of proposed solar panels would not be consistent with the predominant colors displayed by features in the existing landscape. Solar panel contrasts would be further heightened by lightly colored inverters and battery energy storage system containers, and reflective transmission line conductor. Therefore, the characteristics of the Proposed Project would conflict with the established character of the Jacumba community, and would result in a **potentially significant** impact **(Impact AE-1).**

With implementation of mitigation measures **M-AE-1** (non-reflective inverters), **M-AE-2** (non-reflective energy storage containers), **M-AE-3** (non-reflective transmission line), **M-AE-4** (residential properties setback), **M-AE-5** (landscaping), **M-AE-6** (fence slats), impacts would be reduced but not to a less than significant level. Since feasible mitigation measures have not been identified that would further reduce anticipated theme, style, size, scale, massing, and color contrasts resulting from the Proposed Project, **Impact AE-1** would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact AE-2

Under Aesthetics Threshold 2, implementation of the Proposed Project and the transformation of the Project site to a solar energy facility would result in the removal of vegetation throughout the site. The introduction of visually prominent Proposed Project components, including approximately 300,000 solar panels, would substantially change the quality of existing views across the site. Further, the proposed solar facility would conflict with the small-town character of Jacumba and open, unencumbered characteristics of the Project site. The Proposed Project's anticipated visual change and effects to existing visual character would result in a **potentially significant impact (Impact AE-2)**.

With implementation of mitigation measures **M-AE-4** (residential properties setback), **M-AE-5** (landscaping), **M-AE-6** (fence slats), impacts would be reduced but not to a less than significant level. Since feasible measures have not been identified to that would further reduce anticipated visual change and effects to existing visual character, **Impact AE-2** would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Impacts AE-3, AE-4, AE-5, AE-6, AE-7, AE-8 and AE-9

Under Aesthetics Threshold 3, the Proposed Project would create visible contrast that would result in reduced visual quality from viewing locations in the surrounding area. In addition to notably reduced visual quality associated with the introduction of solar panels (and other Proposed Project components) as viewed from I-8, implementation of the Proposed Project would substantially obstruct a focal vista, Old Highway 80. Further, the distribution of 300,000 PV modules across the Project site and alteration

of the open, primarily undeveloped character of the Project site to a solar facility displaying repeating visual elements would create strong visual contrast. Following implementation of the Proposed Project, reduced intactness and unity (i.e., reduced visual quality) is anticipated in scenic views available from local recreational areas (e.g., Jacumba Community Park). State Park lands located to the immediate west of the Project site, and federal recreational areas, including Round Mountain and the Airport Mesa and Table Mountain RMZs, experience relatively low annual recreation use by the public (BLM 2020), but the visual change associated with the Proposed Project as experienced form these locations would be pronounced. In addition, the proximity of these recreational lands would heighten perceived form, line, and color contrast, and the Proposed Project would occupy a substantial portion of the visible landscape in available views.

Due to the wide distribution of solar panels within the 643-acre solar facility, the Proposed Project would substantially reduce the quality of existing views towards the solar facility (i.e., Threshold 3) from I-8 (**Impact AE-3**), Old Highway 80 (**Impact AE-4**), Jacumba Community Park (**Impact AE-5**), Anza-Borrego Desert State Park lands (**Impact AE-6**), Round Mountain (**Impact AE-7**), Airport Mesa (**Impact AE-8**), and Table Mountain and the nearby mesa to the south (**Impact AE-9**). **Impacts AE-3 through AE-9** would be **potentially significant**.

With implementation of mitigation measures **M-AE-1** (non-reflective inverters), **M-AE-2** (non-reflective energy storage containers), **M-AE-3** (non-reflective transmission line), **M-AE-4** (residential properties setback), **M-AE-5** (landscaping), **M-AE-6** (fence slats), impacts would be reduced but not to a less than significant level. Since feasible mitigation measures have not been identified that would further reduce impacts to panoramic or focal vistas, **Impacts AE-3 thru AE-9** would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact AE-CU-1

The Proposed Project would not be consistent with the undeveloped, desert landscape and small town character of Jacumba. Cumulative projects in the area include existing and proposed electric substations, solar energy facilities, wind energy facilities, and transmission projects located within the Proposed Project viewshed and the greater surrounding area. Implementation of projects considered in the cumulative scenario would result in an increasingly modified landscape, diminished day and night views, and reduced visual quality. For example, development of 30 wind turbines on approximately 2,226 acres proposed by the Torrey Wind project and 2,400 acres of wind development proposed under Campo Wind, in conjunction with the Proposed Project and others in the area, would dominate views in the Project region and result in prominent visual change within the largely undeveloped landscape. Therefore, the Proposed Project would result in a **cumulatively considerable impact (Impact AE-CU-1)** on the existing visual character and valued visual character or image of neighborhoods, communities, and localized areas.

With implementation of mitigation measures **M-AE-1** (non-reflective inverters), **M-AE-2** (non-reflective energy storage containers), **M-AE-3** (non-reflective transmission line), impacts would be reduced but not to a less than significant level. Thus, **Impact AE-CU-1** would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Impact AE-CU-2

Views to the Project site are available from I-8; Old Highway 80; Carrizo Gorge Road; nearby recreation areas, including Jacumba Community Park and Anza-Borrego Desert SP; and federal recreational areas, including Round Mountain, Airport Mesa, and Table Mountain RMZs and the Jacumba Wilderness. Although proximity to the Proposed Project from these locations and the clarity of Proposed Project components would vary, each of the identified recreation areas are located in the Proposed Project viewshed. The existing Jacumba Solar, Energia Sierra Juarez transmission line, and East County Substation are located east of the Project site and visible from similar public roads and scenic corridors, and recreational areas; therefore, cumulative projects outside of the Proposed Project viewshed would also be experienced by similar receptors. Combined with the existing East County Substation and Jacumba Solar projects, the Proposed Project would result in a cumulatively considerable impact (**Impact AE-CU-2**) on the panoramic vista available from elevated vantage points in the Airport Mesa and Table Mountain RMZs.

With implementation of mitigation measures **M-AE-1** (non-reflective inverters), **M-AE-2** (non-reflective energy storage containers), **M-AE-3** (non-reflective transmission line) , impacts would be reduced but not to a less than significant level. Thus, **Impact AE-CU-2** would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

Mineral Resources

Impact MR-1

The Proposed Project components, with the exception of the switchyard, would be decommissioned at the end of the Project life. Therefore, the Proposed Project is considered to be an interim use and would not result in a permanent loss of mineral resources. In regard to the 3.2-acre switchyard, there would be a permanent loss in the availability of mineral resources, however, the estimated value of resources within the switchyard site itself does exceed the County's minimum threshold.

However, mitigation for the Proposed Project's impacts to biological resources would require habitat preservation. Biological open space easements would be placed over a portion of the Project site and would not be removed after the life of the Project. These open space easements overlie up to 188 acres of potential mineral resources. The value of material is estimated to be $216,081,994, which would exceed the threshold ($12,500,000) for the County's definition of a significant impact.

Therefore, the biological open space easements, required as mitigation for biological resource impacts, and the switchyard together would result in a **potentially significant impact** (**Impact MI-1**) under Guideline 1.

The County's Guidelines state that "the only mitigation and design factors appropriate would be to extract the resource and reclaim the site before project approval; to avoid the site, which would only be possible if the project site is large enough to accommodate avoidance and to also not be impacted by future mining of the resource; or to approve only land-uses that can be considered minor or temporary nature." Because the impact to the mineral resources on the Project site is caused by a portion of the Proposed Project's biological open space easements, these mitigation measures are considered infeasible. The biological open space easements are intended to preserve the biological integrity of the area in perpetuity as mitigation for the Proposed Project's biological impacts, as discussed further in Chapter 2.3, Biological Resources. The 188-acre portion of the easement contains high biological value with sensitive vegetation types and provides for wildlife habitat and movement. Extracting the resources underlying the open space easements prior to project approval would negate the primary purpose of the biological open space easements.

Other potential measures to mitigate the identified impact relate to policy decisions not under the control of the Proposed Project applicant. The most effective mitigation would be for the County to identify feasible mineral resource extraction areas to implement policies that would avoid resource sterilization (encroachment by development). Since no feasible mitigation exists to reduce impacts to below a level of significance, impacts to mineral resources (**Impact MR-1**) would remain **significant and unavoidable**.

6.2 Significant Irreversible Environmental Changes

Irreversible long-term environmental changes associated with the Project would include those potential significant impacts described in Sections 2.1 through 2.12, and environmental effects analyzed in Sections 3.1.1 through 3.1.7 of this EIR. Construction of the Proposed Project would require fossil fuels, a nonrenewable resource, to power construction vehicles. In exchange for using nonrenewable and non-retrievable resources, the Proposed Project would provide a source of clean, renewable energy. Over the approximately 35-year operational life of the Proposed Project, it would contribute incrementally to the reduction in demand for fossil-fuel-based electricity generation through the production of solar energy. Therefore, the incremental reduction in fossil fuels would result in a beneficial effect through the commitment of renewable resources.

6.3 Growth-Inducing Effects

The CEQA Guidelines (Section 15126.2(d)) identify a project as growth-inducing if it fosters economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or

indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Section 3.1.4, Land Use and Planning and the discussion of Population and Housing in Section 3.2 specifically address whether the Project would induce growth and/or impact populations and housing in the area. This section summarizes this discussion.

The Proposed Project would develop a utility-scale solar energy generation and storage facility that improves electrical reliability in San Diego County and other counties, and supplies California and the region with additional renewable energy supplies. During construction, the Proposed Project would employ a total of approximately 500 workers, with a daily maximum of 500 workers at the peak of construction. During decommissioning, approximately 250 workers would be employed. It is anticipated that workers from the San Diego region to the west or Imperial Valley to the east would construct and decommission the Proposed Project. Because of the presence of locally available workers in San Diego County and Imperial County, and because of the relatively short duration of construction (approximately 13 months) and decommissioning (approximately 10 months), workers are not expected to relocate to the area with their families.

During the operational phase, the Proposed Project would be an unstaffed facility that would be monitored remotely. No full-time personnel would work on site. Up to five workers would periodically be on site during operations for inspections, maintenance, and repair activities. The operational workers are likely to come from the San Diego region to the west and are also not anticipated to relocate to Jacumba Hot Springs or the Mountain Empire Subregion given their limited time at the site annually. Accordingly, the limited scale of the Proposed Project construction, operation and decommissioning would not affect the population base within the Project area.

The Proposed Project would not induce substantial unplanned population growth in the community of Jacumba Hot Springs or the Mountain Empire Subregion. The Proposed Project does not include a residential component such as a residential subdivision, mobile home park, or single-family residences that would cause permanent or temporary population increases, nor would it extend roads or infrastructure (e.g., water, sewer, etc.) into previously unserved areas. Additionally, the Proposed Project would not include any physical or regulatory changes that would remove a restriction to, or encourage population growth in the area, including, but not limited to, the following: large-scale residential development; accelerated conversion of homes to commercial or multifamily use; regulatory changes including General Plan Amendments encouraging population growth, specific plan amendments, zone reclassifications, or sewer or water annexations; or Local Agency Formation Commission annexation actions. The Project also does not propose a recreational component, such as a hotel, resort, campground, or other facility that would attract or accommodate an increase in visitors to the area that would indirectly cause temporary increases in population. Therefore, the Proposed Project would not result in a direct or indirect impacts to population and housing.

As discussed in Section 1.1, Project Objectives, the electricity generated by the Proposed Project would be fed directly into the regional electricity grid and would not serve or facilitate any growth of the local population directly. The Proposed Project is intended to support the state's transition to 100% renewable energy generation and to improve electrical reliability in San Diego County and other counties as a whole. Accordingly, the Proposed Project would supplement the region's energy supply and would not encourage housing growth or result in growth-inducing impacts in Jacumba Hot Springs or the Mountain Empire Subregion.

INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK