

NOTICE OF PREPARATION

DATE: February 2, 2024

TO: State Clearinghouse; Responsible and Trustee Agencies; and Other Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report

PROJECT: Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan

LEAD AGENCY: Westlands Water District
286 W. Cromwell Avenue
Fresno, CA 93711

Westlands Water District (District) intends to prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for its proposed Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (Project). The District is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The District invites written comments on the scope of the environmental analysis and identification of potential environmental issues to be included in the PEIR.

Notice of Preparation: This Notice of Preparation (NOP) has been sent to the Office of Planning and Research, responsible and trustee agencies, other public agencies, and interested members of the public to inform them that the District is preparing a PEIR and to solicit information that will be helpful in the environmental review process. This notice includes a description of the Project and information regarding how to provide comments to the District.

Comment Period: The District is requesting input from responsible and trustee agencies, other public agencies, and interested members of the public regarding the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the PEIR. Agency responses should identify the issues to be considered in the PEIR, including significant environmental issues, and reasonable alternatives and mitigation measures, and other pertinent information consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b).

State law mandates that responses must be sent at the earliest possible date, but postmarked within 30 days from this notice. The 30-day public review period for this NOP extends from **February 2, 2024** to **March 4, 2024**. Please provide any written comments (either by mail or electronically) no later than **5:00 pm on March 4, 2024**. Please direct all comments to the following address:

Westlands Water District
P.O. Box 5199
Fresno, CA 93755
vcip@wwd.ca.gov

Document Availability: This NOP is available for review on the District's website: <https://wwd.ca.gov/news-and-reports/environmental-docs/>.

Scoping Meetings: Two public meetings will be held during the 30-day review period to solicit comments on the scope and content of the PEIR. The **First Scoping Meeting** will be held from **6 p.m. to 8 p.m.** on **February 15, 2024** at the District's main office at **286 W. Cromwell Avenue, Fresno**.

Virtual access to the first public scoping meeting will be available via the Zoom web conference application. To join the meeting, please click the following link or join by phone:

Join on your computer or mobile app

<https://wwd-ca-gov.zoom.us/j/85734077840?pwd=NXUxMWp5K3g5Nzk0ejRKYXFtT3JPUT09>

Meeting ID: 857 3407 7840

Passcode: 3130

Or call in (audio only)

+1 669 444 9171 United States

Meeting ID: 857 3407 7840

Passcode: 3130

To ensure the best experience for attending this meeting virtually, please join via the Desktop or mobile Zoom application. The dial-in audio conferencing number should only be used if other options do not work or are not available.

The scoping meeting will include a brief presentation, providing an overview of the Project. After the presentation, comments will be accepted. Individuals wishing to provide comments during the meeting are encouraged to first register by emailing Russ Freeman at rffreeman@wwd.ca.gov (please include "**Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan PEIR Scoping Meeting Comment Registration**" in the subject line).

The **Second Scoping Meeting** will be held from **6 p.m. to 8 p.m.** on **February 28, 2024** at the **Cantua Creek Elementary School** located at **29288 W. Clarkson Avenue, Cantua Creek**. This meeting will be in-person only, with no remote access via Zoom or audio.

Project Location and Overview: The Project is located in the Fresno County portion of the District on the westside of the San Joaquin Valley (Figure 1). The Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan (VCIP) provides a blueprint for the development of clean energy facilities and supporting infrastructure with an overall generating and delivery capacity of up to 20,000 MW on approximately 130,000 acres of repurposed farmland.

The District's main objectives for VCIP are to repurpose drainage-impaired and other agricultural land for clean energy generation in order to promote enhanced agricultural productivity within the District by: 1) constructively addressing the chronic shortage of surface water deliveries by facilitating redirection of scarce surface water allocations to other productive agricultural land; 2) facilitating SGMA implementation by contributing to the re-allocation of groundwater for irrigation on other productive agricultural land and mitigating risk of subsidence along the San Luis Canal/California Aqueduct; which in combination will result in increased reliability and resilience of agricultural water supply in the Westside Subbasin; and 3) providing for orderly development and decommissioning of clean energy facilities to promote preservation of agricultural land within the District.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The VCIP consists of an “Energy Resource Plan” and an “Infrastructure Plan” as described below.

Energy Resource Plan

The VCIP Energy Resource Plan is a master plan for clean energy development in the form of: 1) solar photovoltaic (PV) generating facilities, and 2) stand-alone energy storage facilities, both of which would be developed within defined “Development Focus Areas” (DFAs) consisting of District-owned land and private lands of participating landowners located within the Fresno County portion of the Westlands Water District service area. It is anticipated that the DFAs would be built out over a 10-year period.

- 1. Solar PV Generating Facilities.** Individual solar facilities would range in size from 100 to 1,150 MW, with a typical facility having a generating capacity of 250 MW on about 1,600 acres. Each solar facility would include an Operations and Maintenance (O&M) facility, and an onsite substation which would convey the solar generation to a gen-tie line (described below). A typical solar facility would include a battery energy storage component with a storage capacity equivalent to the generating capacity of the solar facility. Some solar facilities may be constructed without an integrated battery storage component.
- 2. Energy Storage Facilities.** The VCIP also contemplates a series of stand-alone energy storage facilities which would operate independently of solar generation facilities. It is anticipated that the storage facilities would range in capacity from 100 MW to 1,150 MW, with a typical facility having a capacity of 250 MW. The main storage technology would likely consist of lithium-ion batteries, but other forms of storage could also be utilized. It is anticipated that the stand-alone storage facilities would be located near the VCIP collection substations (described below) in order to minimize gen-tie line length.

Infrastructure Plan

The VCIP Infrastructure Plan includes the following supporting elements for conveyance of solar generation to the state’s load centers: 1) gen-tie lines, 2) collection substations, 3) connector transmission lines, and 4) delivery transmission lines, as follows:

- 1. Gen-Tie Lines.** Each solar PV generating facility and stand-alone energy storage facility would be served by a 230-kV or 500-kV generation-interconnection tie-line (gen-tie line) which would convey the generated power to one of five 500/230-kV collection substations within VCIP.
- 2. Collection Substations.** The Infrastructure Plan includes five collection substations which would be distributed from north to south along the VCIP connector transmission corridor (described below). These 500/230-kV substations would serve as collection points for power generated in the surrounding DFAs as received from the gen-tie network and would provide interconnection to the state’s power grid.
- 3. Connector Transmission Lines within VCIP.** The five collection substations within VCIP would be connected by a backbone 500-kV transmission corridor running through the eastern portion of the District in a generally north-south direction.
- 4. Delivery Transmission Lines Outside VCIP.** In order to deliver VCIP renewable generation to load centers in northern and southern California, new bulk delivery transmission lines would be needed. These 500-kV transmission lines would be subject to the state’s transmission planning and approval processes and are anticipated to be constructed, owned, and operated by public utilities, government utilities, or merchant transmission owners.

DISCRETIONARY APPROVALS

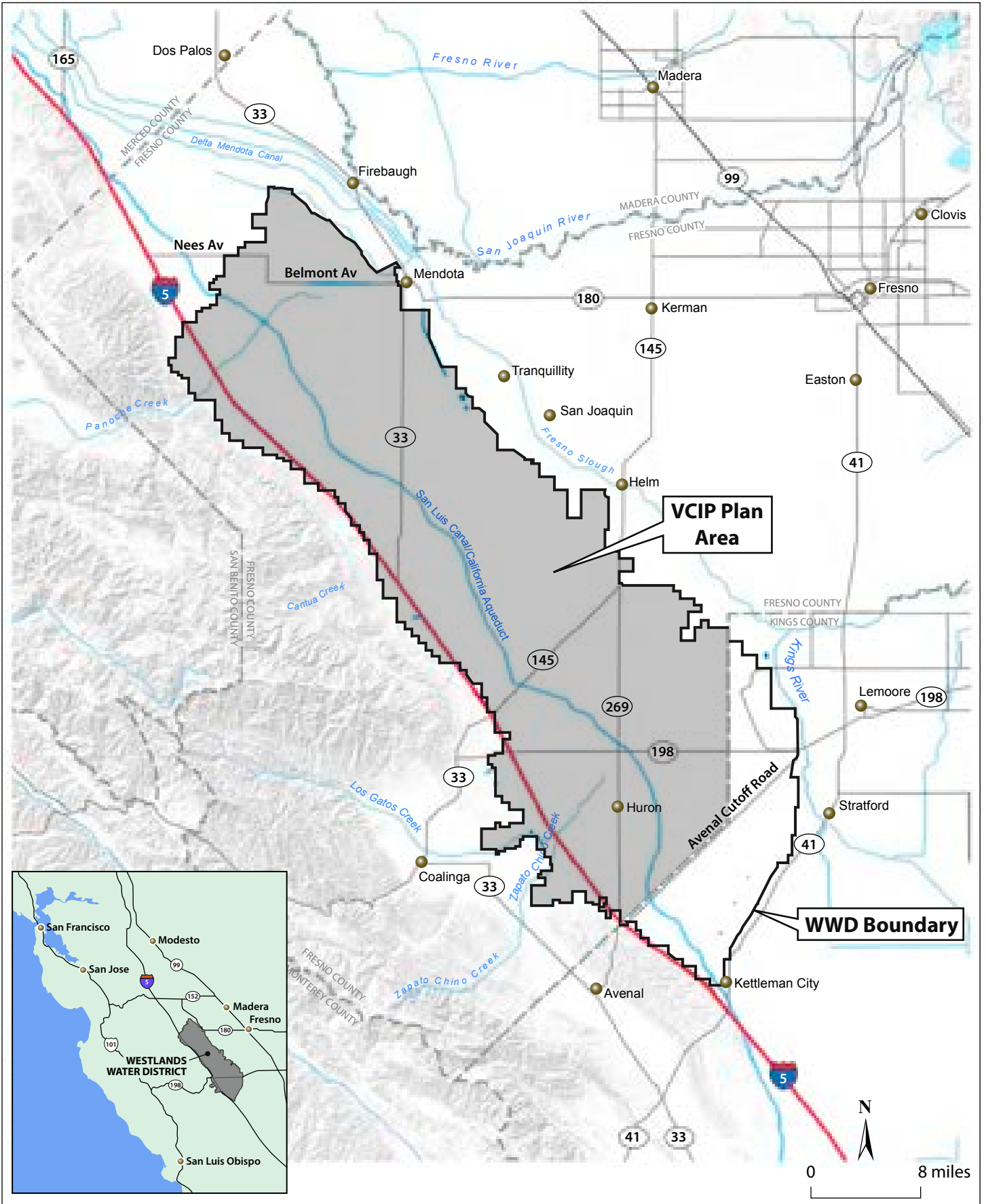
In addition to certification of the Programmatic EIR and approval of the VCIP by the District, subsequent discretionary approvals would be required for individual projects proposed under the VCIP. The solar PV and energy storage projects and associated gen-tie lines would require approval of Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) by Fresno County. The collection substations and transmission lines would require approval by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) or other public agencies with regulatory authority. It is anticipated that all of these subsequent project-specific approvals would require project-level environmental review under CEQA by the approving agencies.

POTENTIAL PROJECT IMPACTS

In accordance with Section 15126 of the CEQA Guidelines, the PEIR will assess the reasonably foreseeable physical changes to the environment that would likely result from implementation of the Project, including direct, indirect and cumulative impacts. The PEIR will identify mitigation measures if necessary and feasible to avoid or substantially reduce Project impacts. The PEIR also will consider alternatives to the Project, including the "No Project" alternative.

The scope of the PEIR for the Project will be based in part on comments received in response to this NOP and public input received during the public scoping meeting. At a minimum, the following environmental issues will be analyzed in the PEIR:

- Aesthetics
- Agricultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Energy
- Geology/Soils and Paleontological Resources
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazards and Hazardous Materials
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use
- Mineral Resources
- Noise
- Public Services
- Transportation
- Tribal Cultural Resources
- Utilities and Service Systems
- Wildfire



Source: Westlands Water District, 2022

Figure 1
Valley Clean Infrastructure Plan
Plan Area