

## 1.1 Purpose of This Environmental Impact Report

Alameda County (County) has prepared this environmental impact report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the State CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 15000 et seq.). CEQA requires that state and local government agencies consider the environmental consequences of projects over which they have discretionary authority before taking action on those projects (California Public Resources Code [PRC] 21000 et seq.).

A draft EIR is an informational document used in state, regional, and local planning and decision-making processes to meet the requirements of CEQA. The purpose of this EIR is to analyze the environmental impacts of the proposed project, to indicate ways to reduce or avoid potential environmental damage of the proposed project, and to identify feasible alternatives. CEQA requires that each public agency mitigate or avoid the significant environmental effects of projects it approves or implements whenever feasible. It is not the purpose of the EIR to recommend either approval or denial of a project. The EIR must disclose environmental effects, including those that cannot be avoided; growth-inducing effects; effects found not to be significant; and significant cumulative impacts of all past, present, and reasonably anticipated future projects.

As required by CEQA, this EIR is an informational document intended to aid in public review and official decision making related to the proposed Sand Hill Wind Project. This EIR addresses the Sand Hill Wind Project, a wind power repowering project proposed for approximately 1,000 acres within the Alameda County portion of the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area (APWRA). Sand Hill Wind, LLC, (Applicant) submitted an application for a conditional use permit (CUP) to Alameda County on January 15, 2013, for a 40-turbine Initial Repower portion of the project. A subsequent Full Repower project, also addressed in this EIR, will require one or more additional CUP applications in the future.

## 1.2 Type of Environmental Impact Report

CEQA identifies various types of EIRs, the most common of which is the project EIR. A project EIR, per State CEQA Guidelines Section 15161, examines the environmental impacts of a specific development project. It examines all phases of the project, including planning, construction, and operation. A second type of EIR, the program EIR, as described in State CEQA Guidelines Section 15168, may address a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either geographically; as logical parts in a series of actions; in connection with rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria governing a continuing program; or as individual activities, with generally similar environmental effects, that may be carried out under the same statutory or regulatory authority. Section 15165 of the State CEQA Guidelines requires a lead agency to prepare a program EIR when an individual project is to be implemented in phases or is a necessary precedent for action on a larger project.

This EIR addresses both project- and program-level phases of the Sand Hill Wind Project at their appropriate levels of detail. This approach allows the County to evaluate the Initial Repower, which constitutes the first phase of a larger repowering project that may be implemented in phases, in detail at the project level, and consider it for approval while also describing and disclosing the anticipated future phases, or Full Repower.

The EIR thus describes and evaluates the Initial Repower (first phase), the subject of the requested CUP, at a project-level. The Initial Repower consists of the decommissioning of 70–80 existing wind turbines equivalent to 4 megawatts (MW) and the installation of 40 new shrouded turbines with a combined generating capacity of 4 MWs. The fundamental objective of the Initial Repower, as described in Chapter 2, *Project Description*, is to assess—through the Sand Hill Wind Phase I 40-Turbine Avian Validation Study (Avian Validation Study)—the functionality of the new turbine design and the extent to which it could reduce impacts on avian species compared to the existing turbines.

In addition, at a programmatic level of detail, the EIR examines the anticipated subsequent Full Repower of the project facilities. The Full Repower is still in the conceptual stage and its design and implementation will depend on the outcome of the Avian Validation Study being prepared for the Initial Repower. Development of the Full Repower will utilize turbine performance data generated by the initial 4 MW repowering effort, to inform the approach to repowering the remainder of the approximately 400 existing turbines in a later phase or phases. The Full Repower is expected to undergo additional environmental review at that time. The Full Repower would include the subsequent repower of up to an additional 30 MW of capacity. The repowering activities could therefore generate up to 34 MW of combined generation capacity if additional CUPs are approved subsequent to the initial 4 MW repowering CUP currently under consideration. No application has been filed for the Full Repower, and only the few specifics such as parcels, acreage, and ultimate desired generating capacity, as described and considered in this EIR, have been identified. Because of its conceptual status and its dependence on the outcome of the Avian Validation Study, the Full Repower is analyzed programmatically in this EIR, in anticipation of further, appropriately detailed project-level analysis before it can be considered for approval.

This document is designed to reflect, within each chapter, the distinction between the project-level Initial Repower and the program-level Full Repower. For both the Initial Repower and Full Repower, this EIR describes the project's environmental setting, considers the potential direct, indirect, cumulative and growth-inducing impacts, evaluates alternatives that could reduce or avoid those impacts, provides mitigation measures to reduce significant impacts identified, and identifies any impacts that would remain significant and unavoidable even after mitigation.

Through preparation of the March 6, 2013, Initial Study (IS) (Appendix A of this EIR), the County considered the proposed project activities and determined that some topics do not require in-depth technical analysis. Based on the findings of the IS, the following resources were dismissed from further evaluation in the EIR.

- Land Use
- Mineral Resources
- Population and Housing
- Public Services
- Recreation

## 1.3 Public Review and CEQA Process

CEQA does not require formal hearings at any stage of the environmental review process (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15202[a]). However, it does encourage “wide public involvement, formal and informal...in order to receive and evaluate public reactions to environmental issues” (State CEQA Guidelines Section 15201) and requires the lead agency to provide the public with the opportunity to provide comments. Alameda County, as lead agency, has provided, and will provide, opportunities for the public to participate in the environmental review processes. These opportunities are summarized below.

The County prepared and circulated an initial study and notice of preparation (IS/NOP) of a draft EIR (SCH #2013032016) for the proposed project on March 6, 2013. The IS/NOP was distributed for a 30-day comment period that ended on April 6, 2013. In addition, the County held a public scoping meeting on March 13, 2013, to solicit input on the scope and focus of the EIR. Comments received on the IS/NOP and during the public scoping meeting were considered in the preparation of the EIR. Appendix A contains the IS/NOP, written comments received on the IS/NOP, and a transcript of the public scoping meeting.

The County has prepared this draft EIR incorporating public and agency responses to the IS/NOP. Like the IS/NOP, the draft EIR is being circulated for review and comment by appropriate agencies, as well as organizations and individuals who have requested notification. In accordance with Section 15205(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines, the County has scheduled a 45-day public review period for the draft EIR, ending at 5:00 p.m. on December 23, 2013. Within that 45-day period, the County will hold one public hearing to request comments on the draft EIR, at the following time and place.

Thursday, December 19, 2013, at 1:30 p.m.  
City of Pleasanton Council Chambers  
200 Old Bernal Road  
Pleasanton, California

This draft EIR is available for review at the Alameda County website ([www.acgov.org/cda/planning](http://www.acgov.org/cda/planning) —select “Pending Land Use Projects,” “Current Development Projects,” “Wind Turbine Projects,” and “Sand Hill Wind Project”) and at the website of the Altamont Pass Scientific Review Committee ([www.altamontsrc.org](http://www.altamontsrc.org)). Copies will also be available for viewing during normal business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.), Monday through Friday, at the Alameda County Community Development Agency, Planning Department, located at 224 West Winton Avenue, Room 111, Hayward, California, 94544. One copy will also be provided for viewing at the Livermore Library, Civic Center, 1188 South Livermore Avenue, Livermore, California, 94550 (phone 925-373-5500). Comments on the draft EIR may be submitted to the Planning Department at the West Winton Avenue address above, to the attention of Sandra Rivera, Assistant Planning Director.

Following the close of the public review period for the draft EIR, the County will consider the comments it receives. The County will prepare a final EIR, incorporating all comments received during the public comment period, for consideration by the East County Board of Zoning Adjustments (EBZA), tentatively scheduled for March 27, 2014. As required by CEQA (Section 21092.5), the final EIR, including written responses to the comments submitted by public agencies, will be available at least 10 days prior to certification. The EBZA will consider the final EIR and the project, as well as the entire administrative record, before deciding whether to approve the applicant’s requested CUP for the Initial Repower.

## 1.4 EIR Organization

The focus of this EIR is to evaluate the environmental consequences of the Sand Hill Wind Project, a repowering project, outlined above and described in detail in Chapter 2, *Project Description*.

The EIR is organized in the following chapters:

- Chapter 1, *Introduction*
- Chapter 2, *Project Description*
- Chapter 3, *Impact Analysis*
- Chapter 4, *Alternatives Analysis*, identifies the alternatives that are being considered to eliminate or reduce significant impacts and provides an evaluation of each.
- Chapter 5, *Other CEQA Considerations*, presents the analysis of the proposed Sand Hill Wind Project's cumulative and growth-inducing impacts. Significant and irreversible environmental changes are also indicated in this chapter.
- Chapter 6, *List of Preparers*, lists the EIR authors, technical specialists, members of the production team, and other key individuals who assisted in the preparation and review of this EIR.
- Chapter 7, *References*, lists documents and persons consulted in the preparation of this EIR.
- Appendix A, *Initial Study and Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report, and Comments on the Initial Study*
- Appendix B, *Avian Study Design*
- Appendix C, *Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Analysis Report*
- Appendix D, *Focused Spring Botanical Survey*
- Appendix E, *Avian Baseline in the Altamont Pass Wind Resource Area*
- Appendix F, *Representative Photos of Biological Communities*
- Appendix G, *Native American Consultation*
- Appendix H, *Desk Top Geologic Assessment*
- Appendix I, *Final Phase I Environmental Site Assessment*
- Appendix J, *Noise Technical Report*
- Appendix K, *Engineering Report – Radio Frequency Facilities*