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Preliminary Staff Assessment Released for Palen Solar Electric Generating System Project

SACRAMENTO - The California Energy Commission staff today released its preliminary analysis of the proposed Palen Solar Electric Generating System project.

In the preliminary staff assessment (PSA), Commission staff concluded that, in all but nine technical sections, with the implementation of recommended mitigation measures described in the conditions of certification, the proposed 500-megawatt (MW) solar thermal power tower project would comply with all applicable laws, ordinances, regulations, and standards (LORS) and that environmental impacts would be less than significant.

The nine technical areas with either a significant, unmitigated impact, LORS non-compliance, or outstanding issues that need to be resolved through additional data, further discussion and/or analysis are: air quality/greenhouse gases; biological resources; cultural resources; geology and paleontology; socioeconomics; traffic and transportation; visual resources; waste management; and worker safety and fire protection.

The PSA serves as the staff's initial evaluation of the environmental, engineering, public health and safety impacts of the proposed facility. The PSA is not a decision nor does it contain final findings of the Commission related to the environmental impacts or the project's compliance with local, state and federal legal requirements.

After receiving public comments and conducting public workshops on the PSA, Commission staff will publish a final staff assessment, which will serve as staff's testimony at evidentiary hearings conducted by the committee of two commissioners reviewing the proposed project. The committee will issue a proposed decision based on evidence presented at the hearings. The proposed decision will be presented to the full Commission for a final decision.

In December 2010, the Commission approved the 500-MW Palen Solar Power Project, which would use parabolic trough technology. In December 2012, the new project owner filed an amendment with the Commission requesting to change the technology from parabolic trough to solar power tower.

The applicant for the amended project, now called the Palen Solar Electric Generating System, is Palen Solar Holdings, LLC, a joint venture of BrightSource Energy, Inc. and Abengoa.

The proposed project consists of two 250-MW solar plants for a total of 500 MW. Each plant would have about 85,000 heliostats for a total of 170,000 heliostats. Heliostats are elevated mirrors used to focus the sun's rays on a solar receiver which produces steam to generate electricity. The solar receiver would be located atop a 750-foot tall power tower near the center of each solar field.

The project site is located about 10 miles east of Desert Center, halfway between Indio and Blythe, in eastern Riverside County. The applicant is seeking a right-of-way grant for approximately 5,200 acres of federal public land managed by the U.S. Bureau of Land

Management which is separately reviewing the project under the National Environmental Policy Act. In addition to the technology change, the amended project was reconfigured to 3,794 acres, a smaller footprint than either of the two alternative configurations approved in the original Commission decision.

The project owner has provided an estimated capital cost for construction of the project as \$2 billion.

If the Commission approves the Palen amendment, the project owner plans to start construction during the fourth quarter of 2013 with commercial operation in June 2016. The project would average 998 workers during construction with a peak of 2,311. Up to 100 workers would be needed when the project is operational, according to the project owner.

The PSA for the Palen amendment is available at: www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/palen/compliance/

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The California Energy Commission is the state's primary energy policy and planning agency. Created by the Legislature in 1974 and located in Sacramento, six basic responsibilities guide the Energy Commission as it sets state energy policy: forecasting future energy needs; licensing thermal power plants 50 megawatts or larger; promoting energy efficiency and conservation by setting the state's appliance and building efficiency standards; supporting public interest energy research that advances energy science and technology through research, development, and demonstration programs; developing renewable energy resources and alternative renewable energy technologies for buildings, industry and transportation; planning for and directing state response to energy emergencies. For more information, visit: For more information, visit: www.energy.ca.gov or www.energy.ca.gov/releases/.

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