CHAPTER 6.0 – OTHER CEQA CONSIDERATIONS

This chapter presents the evaluation of other types of environmental impacts required by CEQA that are not covered within the other chapters of this Draft EIR. The other CEQA considerations include effects not found to be significant, irreversible environmental changes, growth-inducing impacts, and significant and unavoidable adverse impacts.

6.1 EFFECTS NOT FOUND TO BE SIGNIFICANT

This section includes information from the Initial Study that was prepared by Chambers Group in March 2022, which can be found in Appendix A: Initial Study (County 2022). In addition to the environmental impact thresholds analyzed in detail in this EIR, the County has determined through the preparation of an Initial Study that the development and operation of the Project would not result in potentially significant impacts to the environmental impact topics discussed below. Section 15128 of the CEQA Guidelines requires a brief description of any possible significant effects that were determined not to be significant and were not analyzed in detail within the environmental analysis. Therefore, this section has been included in this Draft EIR as required by CEQA.

The discussion below presents the analysis of the effects related to aesthetics, agriculture and forestry resources, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, noise, population and housing, public services, recreation, transportation, utilities, and wildfire not found to be significant. Any thresholds or topics not addressed in this section are addressed in Section 4.0: Environmental Impact Analysis of this Draft EIR.

6.1.1 Aesthetics

Threshold b) Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a state scenic highway?

The Project is not located within the viewshed of any officially designated State scenic highways. HWY 111, which is approximately 3 miles east of the Project site, is listed by Caltrans as eligible for State scenic highway designation. However, the eligible section of HWY 111 is from Bombay Beach to the Imperial County–Riverside County line, approximately 13 miles northwest of the Project site at the closest point (Caltrans 2018), and the Project site is not visible from the eligible scenic-designated highway segment. Further, the Project site is void of any trees, rock outcrops, or historic buildings and, therefore, no scenic resources would be damaged as a result of the Project. No impacts would occur to scenic resources along a State scenic highway, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold d) Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area?

As part of the Project design, industrial grade lighting sources would be required for Project operations and safety purposes. Lighting would be covered and directed downward (down shielded) or towards the proposed facility to avoid backscatter. Nighttime illumination features for the Project would be controlled with sensors or switches operated such that lighting would only be activated when needed. During construction of the Project, nighttime lighting would be required during the period of temporary nighttime construction. Nighttime construction would be temporarily required during the drilling of the HKP1 geothermal wells as well as times of extreme daytime heat, in which it would be safer to work during

cooler nighttime hours. The Project will introduce new structures built with metallic materials including transmission poles and conductors that could produce glare. However, the steel and metal alloy pipelines and vessels within the HKP1 and HKL1 will be painted and will not be a major source of glare. The Project is in a rural area of the County, with the closest residence approximately 1 mile east of the Project site on Pound Road. Davis Road is an unpaved road that typically does not experience through traffic. Therefore, workers and individuals visiting the Project would be the majority viewers of the glare or new light. Impacts related to increased light and glare from construction and operation of the proposed Project would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.2 Agricultural and Forest Resources

Threshold a) Convert Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance (Farmland), as shown on the maps prepared pursuant to the Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program of the California Resources Agency, to non-agricultural use?

According to the California Department of Conservation's Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program, the Project site is designated as "Other Land" (DOC 2022a). No Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance is located within or in proximity to the Project site. The County General Plan designates the Project site as Agriculture land use; however, according to the General Plan Land Use Element, a non-agricultural land use may be permitted within General Plan-designated agricultural land if the use does not conflict with agricultural operations and will not result in the premature elimination of agricultural operations (County 1993). There is no existing agricultural land on the Project site, thus the Project would not conflict with or eliminate agricultural operations. No impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold b) Conflict with existing zoning for agricultural use, or a Williamson Act Contract?

The Project site is zoned S-1, S-2, and M-2 and is located within the geothermal overlay zone (G) and pre-existing allowed/restricted overlay zone (PE). No land within the Project site is zoned for agricultural use. The Project site is not subject to the provisions of a Williamson Act contract (DOC 2020). No impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold c) Conflict with existing zoning for, or cause rezoning of, forest land (as defined in Public Resources Code section 12220(g)), timberland (as defined by Public Resources Code section 4526), or timberland zoned Timberland Production (as defined by Government Code Section 51104(g))?

Threshold d) Result in the loss of forest land or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

As previously mentioned, the Project site is zoned S-1-G, S-2-G, and M-2-G-PE. No land within the Project site is zoned forest land or timberland and there is no existing forest land on the Project site or in the immediate vicinity. The Project would not result in the loss of forest land or the conversion of forest land to non-forest use; no impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold e) Involve other changes in the existing environment which, due to their location or nature, could result in conversion of Farmland, to non-agricultural use or conversion of forest land to non-forest use?

The Project site is zoned S-1-G, S-2-G, and M-2-G-PE and does not contain agricultural land or forest land. The Project would not result in the conversion of agricultural land or forest land. No impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

6.1.3 Geology and Soils

Threshold a) iv) Landslides?

The Project site is flat and is not located within an identified landslide zone (DOC 2022b). According to the County General Plan, the closest area of landslide activity is on the border of San Diego and Imperial Counties approximately 30 miles west of the Project site (County 1993). The Project would not exacerbate the risk of loss, injury, or death involving landslides. No impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold b) Result in substantial soil erosion or the loss of topsoil?

Project construction and operations have the potential to result in soil erosion and loss of topsoil mainly through grading. Approximately 400,000 cubic yards of soil will be brought on site to raise the elevation of the Project site. Existing soil will be covered with aggregate and other materials that will be compacted to achieve final stabilization. The imported materials will be stabilized and will not be subject to erosion. Underlying topsoil would be covered with the aggregate and would not be subject to erosion. Additionally, the Project would implement standard industry methods, such as BMPs, to prevent surface runoff and erosion where applicable. These BMPs would comply with the County Building & Grading Regulations and the SWPPP developed for the Project. Moreover, a Drainage and Grading Plan will be submitted to the County to ensure implementation of all required BMPs. Impacts related to soil erosion would be less than significant and no further analysis is required.

6.1.4 Hazards and Hazardous Materials

Threshold c) Emit hazardous emissions or handle hazardous or acutely hazardous materials, substances, or waste within one-quarter mile of an existing or proposed school?

Although the Project has the potential to emit hazardous emissions and/or handle hazardous substances, the Project site is not within 0.25 mile of an existing or proposed school. The closest school to the Project site is Grace Smith Elementary School, approximately 4 miles northeast in Niland. Additionally, the Emergency Response Plan (ERP) that would be prepared and implemented for the Project will limit human risk associated with exposure to hazardous materials, with special consideration of the schools in the area. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold d) Be located on a site, which is included on a list of hazardous materials site complied pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5 and, as a result, would it create a significant hazard to the public or the environment?

According to the Department of Toxic Substance Control's EnviroStor Database and the State Water Resources Control Board's GeoTracker Database, there are no recorded hazardous material sites within a mile of the Project site (DTSC 2022; SWRCB 2022). The site is currently and has been, vacant undeveloped land. Therefore there is no impact and no further analysis is required.

Threshold e) For a project located within an airport land use plan or, where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project result in a safety hazard or excessive noise for people residing or working in the project area?

The Project site is not located within two miles of a public airport or public use airport or within the boundaries of an airport land use plan. The closest airport is Calipatria Municipal Airport approximately 7 miles southeast of the Project site. Therefore, the Project would not expose people working in the Project area to safety hazards or excessive noise. No impact would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold f) Impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

Temporary or single-lane closure of Davis Road may occur during the transport of oversized equipment or construction activities. Road closures would be coordinated with County Public Works, the County Sheriff, and Imperial County Fire Department prior to closure. The Project is not located within an emergency evacuation route. Davis Road is currently impassible beyond the Project, and the road is not used for emergency evacuation. The Project's construction and operational activities would be in compliance with the Imperial County Emergency Operations Plan (EOP) and Multi-Jurisdiction Hazard Mitigation Plan (MJHMP) and would not physically interfere with the execution of the policies and procedures in these plans (County 2016 and 2021). Therefore, the Project would not impair implementation of or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.5 Hydrology and Water Quality

Threshold b) Substantially decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater recharge such that the project may impede sustainable groundwater management of the basin?

The Project will not use groundwater as a source of water supply for construction or operation. The Project would involve dewatering of shallow groundwater during excavation and foundation construction. The short-term and localized dewatering of the areas of excavation and building foundations during construction would not decrease groundwater supplies or interfere substantially with groundwater management. The Project would convert an area that is currently undeveloped to a developed land use and would create approximately 50 acres of impervious surfaces. The increase in impervious surface would result in a small reduction of groundwater recharge; however, the limited rainfall on the area would flow to an unlined retention basin where the groundwater would be allowed to infiltrate into the soil. The impact on groundwater supplies and recharge would therefore be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold c) Substantially alter the existing drainage pattern of the site or area, including through the alteration of the course of a stream or river or through the addition of impervious surfaces, in a manner which would:

(i) result in substantial erosion or siltation on- or off-site;
(ii) substantially increase the rate or amount of surface runoff in a manner which would result in flooding on- or offsite;

(iii) create or contribute runoff water which would exceed the capacity of existing or planned stormwater drainage systems or provide substantial additional sources of polluted runoff; or;

(iv) impede or redirect flood flows?

No rivers or streams travel through the Project site or are directly adjacent to the Project site. The Alamo River is approximately 2 miles southwest of the Project site and drains to the Salton Sea.. Although Project construction and operations would have the potential to result in soil erosion and runoff on and offsite due to grading and increased impervious surfaces, through implementation of a SWPPP and a Drainage and Grading Plan, the Project would implement standard industry BMPs and relevant Basin BMPs to control off-site discharges. Additionally, a stormwater retention basin would be developed on the site. In order to prevent substantial erosion resulting from high winds in the area, a Fugitive Dust Suppression Plan will be prepared and the Project site will be watered as necessary. The site will be permanently stabilized during operation through use of aggregate, gravel, concrete, or other stabilizing materials.

The Project site is not located within a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Flood Hazard Zone (FEMA, 2022; FIRM Map Number 06025C0725C). Additionally, a berm/levee will run along the western boundary of the site to contain any stormwater runoff and prevent stormwater run on.

With implementation of BMPs and construction of a new retention basin, substantial erosion and runoff on and offsite is not expected. Less than significant impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold d) In flood hazard, tsunami, or seiche zones, risk release of pollutants due to project inundation?

As mentioned above, the Project site is not within a FEMA Flood Hazard Zone. The Project site is one mile east of the Salton Sea, which is a potential source of seiche. According to the County General Plan's Seismic and Public Safety Element, a seiche at the Salton Sea could occur under the appropriate seismic conditions, but there have been a number of seismic events with no significant seiches occurring to date (County 1993); therefore, a seiche is not expected to impact the Project site and cause discharge of pollutants. Further, all dams within the County are approximately 65 miles east of the Project site, and the Project site is approximately 100 miles from the coast of the Pacific Ocean. Thus, there is no risk of dam inundation or tsunami within the Project site. The impact from a seiche would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold e) Conflict with or obstruct implementation of a water quality control plan or sustainable groundwater management plan?

As discussed above, implementation of a SWPPP and a Drainage and Grading Plan would ensure the Project would implement standard industry BMPs and relevant Basin BMPs to control off-site discharges. Additionally, a stormwater retention basin would be developed on the site. The Project will not allow any offsite discharges that could violate water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, or otherwise substantially degrade surface or ground water quality. Additionally, all water required for the Project would be purchased from the IID, and IID operates no water wells or groundwater recharge areas (IID 2018). Impacts would be considered less than significant and no further analysis is required.

6.1.6 Land Use and Planning

Threshold a) Physically divide an established community?

The Project is located in a rural area approximately 3.6 miles west of Niland, CA, which is the closest nearby community. The gen-tie line required by the Project would utilize existing transmission ROW, and traverse the existing area but would not physically divide the area for approximately 2.3 miles southeast. There are no residences in close proximity to the Project site; thus, the Project would not physically divide an established community and no impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

Threshold b) Cause a significant environmental impact due to a conflict with any land use plan, policy, or regulation adopted for the purpose of avoiding or mitigating an environmental effect?

The power and lithium production facilities are located in an area that is zoned S-1-G (open space / geothermal overlay), S-2-G (open space/preservation/geothermal overly) (S-1-G) and M-2-G-PE (medium industrial/geothermal overlay) and has an Agricultural land use. S-1-G, S-2-G, and M-2-G-PE allow geothermal exploration with a conditional use permit (CUP). Although S-2-G is for preservation only a well pad would be on the site along with a portion of the S-Berm/Extension Road which are allowed uses. The County Land Use Ordinance, Division 17, includes the Renewable Energy (RE) Overlay Zone, which authorizes the development and operation of renewable energy projects, with an approved conditional use permit (CUP). According to the General Plan Land Use Element, a non-agricultural land use may be permitted within General Plan-designated agricultural land if the use does not conflict with agricultural operations and will not result in the premature elimination of agricultural operations (County 1993). As analyzed in Section II, Agriculture and Forest Resources above, there is no existing agricultural land on the Project site and the land is not designated as Prime Farmland, Unique Farmland, or Farmland of Statewide Importance by the Department of Conservation. The mineral extraction is associated with the geothermal extraction and would be compatible with the geothermal overlay. Implementation of the Project would require the approval of a CUP by the County to allow for the construction and operation of the proposed geothermal and mineral extraction facility on land designated as agriculture. With obtaining a CUP, the Project would be consistent with the land use plan; therefore, impacts would be less than significant and no further analysis is required.

6.1.7 Mineral Resources

Threshold a) 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?

Threshold b) Result in the loss of availability of a locally-important mineral resource recovery site delineated on a local general plan, specific plan or other land use plan?

Although there are geothermal resources and minerals underlying the Project, there are no designated mineral resource zones or mineral resource recovery sites within the vicinity of the Project site (DOC 2022c). There are a number of mines along the Chocolate Mountain Range to the east, but the closest is approximately 5.3 miles from the Project site (DOC 2022d). Additionally, a part of this Project is a geothermal brine processing plant that would produce commercial-grade lithium hydroxide, silica, bulk sulfide, and polymetallic products, increasing the availability of these mineral resources. In utilizing the waste stream to produce these mineral resources, the Project actually represents a gain in the availability

of these resources. The Project would be in alignment with the County General Plan's Renewable Energy and Transmission Element, Objective 3.2, which states that the County should "encourage the continued development of the mineral extraction/production industry for job development using geothermal brines from the existing and future geothermal flash power plants" (County, 1993). No known mineral resources or mineral resource recovery sites would be lost as a result of the Project; thus, no impacts would occur and no further analysis is required.

6.1.8 Noise

Threshold b) Generation of excessive groundborne vibration or groundborne noise levels?

Groundborne vibration and groundborne noise could originate from earth movement during the construction phase of the Project and during pile-driving for foundation installation. There are no structures or sensitive receptors in proximity to the Project site with the nearest residence being half mile southeast of the Project site, and vibration attenuates rapidly with distance. Due to the distance between the Project and the nearest structure, the Project would not generate vibration that would be a nuisance or cause damage to any structures. The Project would be expected to comply with all applicable requirements for long-term operation, as well as with measures to reduce excessive groundborne vibration and noise to ensure that the Project would not expose persons or structures to excessive groundborne vibration. The impact from vibration would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold c) For a project located within the vicinity of a private airstrip or an airport land use plan or where such a plan has not been adopted, within two miles of a public airport or public use airport, would the project expose people residing or working in the project area to excessive noise levels?

The Project site is not located within two miles of a public airport or public use airport. The closest airport is Calipatria Municipal Airport, approximately 7 miles southeast of the Project site. Therefore, the Project would not expose people working in the Project area to excessive noise levels. No impact would occur, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.9 Population and Housing

Threshold a) Induce substantial unplanned population growth in an area, either directly (for example, by proposing new homes and business) or indirectly (for example, through extension of roads or other infrastructure)?

The Project involves construction and operation of a geothermal power plant and a geothermal brine processing plant and does not propose the development of any permanent housing on site. Temporary housing will be provided on site for the well drilling crew that will be working 24 hours a day for approximately 6 months; however, the temporary housing will be removed once the well-drilling phase is complete. The Project operation would require approximately 112 full-time employees who are expected to live in and commute from the local surrounding communities. Therefore, the Project is not anticipated to induce population growth directly or indirectly; thus, impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold b) Displace substantial numbers of existing people or housing, necessitating the construction of replacement housing elsewhere?

The Project development site is approximately 65 acres and is not zoned for housing. There are no residences within the Project site or and the closest residence is a single residence more than half mile away; thus, no existing people or housing would be displaced as a result of the Project. No impacts would occur, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.10 Public Services

Threshold a) Would the project result in substantial adverse physical impacts associated with the provision of new or physically altered governmental facilities, need for new or physically altered governmental facilities, the construction of which could cause significant environmental impacts, in order to maintain acceptable service ratios, response times or other performance objectives for any of the public services:

i) Fire Protection?

Fire protection and emergency medical services in the Project area are provided by the Imperial County Fire Department (ICFD). The closest station to the Project site is the Niland Station, approximately 4 miles east, or an approximately 9-minute drive (Google, 2022). During construction, the Project site will be cleared of all vegetation and cleared areas will be maintained throughout construction. Fire extinguishers will also be available around the construction site. In case of emergency response during operations, Project access from Davis Road would have turnaround areas to allow clearance for fire trucks per fire department standards. In addition, a 100,000-gallon water storage tank will be located on site for fire-water storage. The fire protection system will consist of a fire main and surface distribution equipment such as yard hydrants and hose houses, monitors around the perimeter of the cooling tower, automatic sprinklers for the turbine generator and auxiliary equipment, and a complete detection and alarm system. The firewater supply and pumping system will provide an adequate quantity of fire-fighting water.

All fire suppression systems will be designed in accordance with federal, State, and local fire codes; OSHA regulations; and other jurisdictional codes, requirements, and standard practices. The ICFD will be consulted to review and approve any and all proposed fire equipment, apparatus, and related fire prevention plans. Acceptable service ratios and response times for fire protection will be maintained following Project implementation through consultation with the ICFD and the County. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

ii) Police Protection?

Police protection services in the area are provided by the Imperial County Sheriff's Department. The closest police station to the Project site is the Imperial County Sheriff's office in Niland, approximately 4 miles east, or an approximately 10-minute drive (Google 2022). The increase in construction related traffic is not anticipated to significantly increase demand on law enforcement services due to the rural nature of the Project vicinity. Additionally, the Project site would have a security fence around the Project site and include obscured fencing around processing areas. In addition, approximately 112 full-time employees will be on site 24 hours a day, 7 days a week during operations of the Project, thereby minimizing the need for police surveillance.

The workforce for the Project would come from surrounding areas, and the Project workforce would not create a new demand for police protection. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

iii) Schools?
iv) Parks?
v) Other Public Facilities?

It is estimated that there will be up to 500 workers traveling to the Project site during peak construction and approximately 112 full-time employees during operations. It is expected that most of these workers/employees will commute to the Project site from surrounding communities. Therefore, substantial increases in population that will adversely affect local schools, parks, or other public facilities are not anticipated. No impacts would occur, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.11 Recreation

Threshold a) Would the project increase the use of the existing neighborhood and regional parks or other recreational facilities such that substantial physical deterioration of the facility would occur or be accelerated?

Threshold b) Does the project include recreational facilities or require the construction or expansion of recreational facilities which might have an adverse effect on the environment?

There are no parks or other developed federal, State, or County recreational facilities in the Project area or immediate vicinity. Further, the Project involves the construction of a geothermal power plant and brine processing plant and would not construct any recreational facilities. It is estimated that there will be up to 500 workers at the Project site during peak construction and approximately 112 full-time employees during operations. These construction workers and employees are expected to come from existing populations that live in and commute from the surrounding local communities. Therefore, the Project would not cause an increase in population that would result in physical deterioration of existing recreational facilities. No impacts would occur, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.12 Transportation

Threshold c) Substantially increases hazards due to a geometric design feature (e.g., sharp curves or dangerous intersections) or incompatible uses (e.g., farm equipment)?

Threshold d) Result in inadequate emergency access?

The Project would not increase hazards due to a design feature nor impact emergency access. For emergency response, the Project access road on Davis Road would have turnaround areas to allow clearance for fire trucks per fire department standards: approximately 70 feet by 70 feet, and 20-foot-wide. The County Department of Public Works, the County Sheriff, and ICFD will be consulted as necessary to ensure that any potential impacts to the public or emergency services traveling on Davis Road during Project construction or operations would be minimized. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.13 Utilities

Threshold c) Result in a determination by the wastewater treatment provider which serves or may serve the project that it has adequate capacity to serve the project's projected demand in addition to the provider's existing commitments?

Wastewater, including non-process wash water and sanitary waste, will be generated during facility operations. Sanitary drains will collect all sanitary waste and non-process wash water and discharge to an appropriately sized and County-approved septic system. The septic system will be engineered and operated to meet County Environmental Health requirements. The project would not affect wastewater treatment capacity. A less than significant impact would occur, and no further analysis is required.

6.1.14 Wildfire

Threshold a) Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?

As mentioned in Section IX Hazards and Hazardous Materials above, CALFIRE's Fire Hazard Severity Zone Viewer identifies no very high, high, or moderate fire hazard severity zones in the local or state responsibility areas within 30 miles of the Project site (CALFIRE 2022). Additionally, as mentioned in Section XV Public Services, all fire suppression systems will be designed in accordance with federal, state, and local fire codes; occupational health and safety regulations; and other jurisdictional codes, requirements, and standard practices. The ICFD will also be consulted to review and approve any and all proposed fire equipment, apparatus, and related fire prevention plans. Compliance with local emergency response and evacuation plans, including the EOP and MJHMP, will be maintained through consultation with the ICFD and the County. Impacts would be less than significant and no further analysis is required.

Threshold b) Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?

As mentioned above, CALFIRE does not have any designated very high, high, or moderate fire hazard severity zones in the local or state responsibility areas within 30 miles of the Project site (CALFIRE 2022). The Seismic and Public Safety Element of the County General Plan also states that the potential for a major fire in the unincorporated areas of the County is generally low (County 1993). Moreover, the Project site is flat and is not within an area of risk due to slope. Although the County has experienced damage from heavy winds in the past, hazards in the County are managed by the MJHMP which is reviewed and updated every 5 years (County 2021). Further, during construction the Project site and access road will be cleared of all vegetation and cleared areas will be maintained throughout construction. Fire extinguishers will be available around the construction site as well. During operations, a brush control program will be prepared and implemented on those portions of the Project site that will not be developed. Hazardous materials onsite during operations may be flammable, but fire suppression systems will be installed and the ICFD will be consulted to review and approve any and all proposed fire equipment, apparatus, and related fire prevention plans. Thus, employees onsite would not be exposed to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire. Impacts would be less than significant and no further analysis is required.

Threshold c) Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?

CAL FIRE maps note that no very high, high, or moderate fire hazard severity zones in the local or State responsibility areas are within 30 miles of the Project site (CAL FIRE 2020). To prevent fire-related impacts on the Project site, the Project access road off Davis Road would be constructed with turnaround areas; a 100,000-gallon fire-fighting water storage tank will be constructed; and fire protection system will be installed. These features would help fire suppression and would not exacerbate fire risk. Further, these features will be constructed/installed and maintained within previously disturbed areas of the Project site in accordance with federal, State, and local fire codes; occupational health and safety regulations; and other jurisdictional codes, requirements, and standard practices. No significant environmental impacts would result. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

Threshold d) Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?

The Project site is flat and is not located within an identified landslide zone (DOC 2022b). According to the County General Plan, the closest area of landslide activity is on the border of San Diego and Imperial Counties, approximately 30 miles west of the Project site (County 1993). As described in Section X Hydrology and Water Quality, flooding on site would be prevented by the flood protection berm on the western sides of the Project site. The Project would not expose people or structures to significant risks as a result of runoff, post fire instability, or drainage changes. Impacts would be less than significant, and no further analysis is required.

6.2 IRREVERSIBLE ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES

According to CEQA Guidelines, "[u]ses of nonrenewable resources during the initial and continued phases of the project may be irreversible since a large commitment of such resources makes removal or nonuse thereafter unlikely. Primary impacts and, particularly, secondary impacts (such as highway improvement which provides access to a previously inaccessible area) generally commit future generations to similar uses. Also, irreversible damage can result from environmental accidents associated with the project. Irretrievable commitments of resources should be evaluated to assure that such current consumption is justified." Therefore, the purpose of this analysis is to identify any significant irreversible environmental effects of Project implementation that cannot be avoided.

Energy resources needed for the construction and operation of the Project would contribute to the incremental depletion of renewable and nonrenewable resources. Resources, such as timber used in building construction are generally considered renewable and would ultimately be replenished. Nonrenewable resources, such as petrochemical construction materials, steel, copper, lead and other metals, gravel, concrete, and other materials, are typically considered finite and would not be replenished over the lifetime of the Project.

Although the Project is a mineral extraction project, the Project would use geothermal brine to produce quantities of lithium hydroxide, silica, bulk sulfide, and other minerals for commercial sale. Geothermal energy generation, which involves the extraction of geothermal brine, is considered a renewable process because its source is the almost unlimited amount of heat generated by the Earth's core. Even in

geothermal areas dependent on a reservoir of hot water, the volume taken out can be reinjected, making it a sustainable energy source. This is the case for the Project site, as spent process fluid will be reinjected into the geothermal resource; thus, the geothermal brine used for mineral extraction is considered a renewable resource, and no mineral resources would be depleted as a result of the Project. IID has met or exceeded all Renewable Portfolio Standard requirements to date, procuring renewable energy from diverse sources, including biomass, biowaste, geothermal, hydroelectric, solar, and wind. Nevertheless, according to IID's 2018 Integrated Resource Plan, only 35 percent of IID's overall generation delivered to customers was from renewable energy sources; and that number is anticipated to reach only 50 percent by 2030 (IID 2018c).

At the end of the Project's operation term, the Applicant may determine that the Project should be decommissioned and deconstructed. Should the Project be decommissioned, the Project Applicant is required to restore land to its pre-project state. Consequently, some of the resources on the site could potentially be retrieved after the site has been decommissioned. Concrete footings, foundations, and pads would be removed and recycled at an offsite location. All remaining components would be removed, and all disturbed areas would be reclaimed and recontoured. The Applicant anticipates using the best available recycling measures at the time of decommissioning.

6.3 GROWTH-INDUCING IMPACTS

Pursuant to Section 15126.2 of the CEQA Guidelines: an EIR must address whether a project will directly or indirectly foster growth as follows:

> *[An EIR shall] discuss the ways in which the Proposed Project could foster economic or population growth, or the construction of additional housing, either directly or indirectly, in the surrounding environment. Included in this are projects which would remove obstacles to population growth (a major expansion of wastewater treatment plant, might, for example, allow for more construction in service areas). Increases in the population may further tax existing community service facilities so consideration must be given to this impact. Also, discuss the characteristic of some projects, which may encourage and facilitate other activities that could significantly affect the environment, either individually or cumulatively. It must not be assumed that growth in any area is necessarily beneficial, detrimental, or of little significance to the environment.*

As discussed below, this analysis evaluates whether the Project would directly or indirectly induce economic, population, or housing growth in the surrounding environment.

6.3.1 Direct Growth-Inducing Impacts

Direct growth-inducing impacts occur when the development of a project induces population growth or the construction of additional developments in the same area of a proposed project and produces related growth-associated impacts. Growth-inducing projects remove physical obstacles to population growth, such as the construction of a new road into an undeveloped area, a wastewater treatment plant expansion, and projects that allow new development in the service area.

If the growth is not consistent with or accommodated by local land use plans and growth management plans and policies for the area affected, then the growth inducement may constitute an adverse impact. Local land use plans provide for land use development patterns and growth policies that allow for the

orderly expansion of urban development supported by adequate urban public services. A project that would conflict with the local land use plans (i.e., "disorderly" growth) could indirectly cause additional adverse environmental impacts and other public services impacts. To assess whether a growth-inducing project would result in adverse secondary effects, the growth accommodated by a project must be assessed to determine if it would or would not be consistent with applicable land use plans.

The Project involves construction and operation of a plant to extract lithium hydroxide, silica, bulk sulfide, and other commercially viable substances from geothermal brine produced at HR1. The Project would not include the construction of any housing and would not involve the development of any new public roadways, new water systems, or sewer. Therefore, the Project would not further facilitate additional development into outlying areas.

The County General Plan designates the Project site as Agriculture land use; however, according to the General Plan Land Use Element, a nonagricultural land use may be permitted within General Plan-designated agricultural land if the use does not conflict with agricultural operations and will not result in the premature elimination of agricultural operations (County 2015a). No agricultural land exists on the Project site; thus, the Project would not conflict with or eliminate agricultural operations. The Project site is zoned Open Space (S-1-G), Open Space Preservation (S-2-G), Medium Industrial (M-2-G-PE) and is located within the geothermal overlay zone (G) and pre-existing allowed/restricted overlay zone (PE).

6.3.2 Indirect Growth-Inducing Impacts

CEQA Guidelines also specify that the environmental effects of induced growth are considered indirect impacts of the Proposed Project. The additional demand for housing, commodities, and services that new development causes or attracts by increasing population in the area are examples of indirect growth-inducing impacts or secondary effects of growth.

Indirect growth-inducing impacts typically include substantial new, permanent employment opportunities that can result from a project. The Project is located within the unincorporated area of Imperial County, and it does not involve the development of permanent residences that would directly result in population growth in the area. Approximately 200 to 250 workers are anticipated to be required at peak periods of Project construction. Beginning with startup operations, the Project is expected to be operated by a total staff of approximately 112 full-time, onsite employees. The unemployment rate in Imperial County as of December 2020 was 17.7 percent with 11,900 people unemployed (EDD 2021). The Applicant expects to utilize available workers from the local and regional area. Based on the unemployment rate and the availability of the local workforce, the Project would not have a growth-inducing effect related to workers moving into the area and increasing the demand for housing and services.

6.4 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The potentially adverse effects of the Project are discussed in Chapter 3.0 of this Draft EIR. Mitigation measures have been recommended that would reduce impacts to biological resources, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, utilities and service systems, and transportation impacts to less than significant based on each set of significance criteria. No significant and unavoidable impacts to any environmental resources would occur.

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