
San Bernardino County



NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A DRAFT JOINT EIS/EIR AND SCOPING MEETING

DATE: October 17, 2025

TO: Responsible Agencies and Interested Parties

SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of a Draft Joint Environmental Impact Statement / Environmental Impact Report and Scoping Meeting

The County of San Bernardino (as the Local Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act), in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management (as the Federal Lead Agency under the National Environmental Policy Act), will conduct a review of the environmental impacts of the Castle Mountain Mine Phase II Expansion Project (Project). Due to the potential for significant environmental impacts, the County of San Bernardino (County) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) are issuing this Notice of Preparation (NOP) of a Joint Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) / Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Project. Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the BLM has separately published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register announcing its intention to initiate the federal environmental review process for this Project. This NOP is being issued under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines to gather input from agencies and the public on the scope and content of the environmental information to be included in the Joint EIS/EIR.

PROJECT TITLE: Castle Mountain Mine Phase II Expansion Project

PROJECT NUMBER: MRAA-2022-00002

PROJECT APPLICANT: Castle Mountain Venture (CMV)

PROJECT SITE

The Castle Mountain Mine (CMM) is an open-pit gold mine/heap-leach operation administered by the BLM California Needles Field Office (NFO). The mine is located in the Mojave Desert in the historic Hart Mining District of San Bernardino County, California, approximately 100 miles east of Barstow, California, 60 miles south of Las Vegas, Nevada, and 40 miles northwest of the BLM office in Needles, California (Figure 1). Elevations range from 4,100 feet to 5,100 feet above mean sea level.

BACKGROUND

The Castle Mountain mining district in California began as a gold mining camp in 1907, with production peaking in the mid-1990s and resuming in 2010 after a period of inactivity. The CMM site was initially developed for heap leaching gold mining and now includes an open-pit mine and a heap-leach plant.

In October of 1990 and March of 1998, the BLM NFO approved a Plan of Operation for the CMM with a Record of Decision in compliance with the NEPA. In compliance with CEQA and the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA), the County approved a Conditional Use Permit and Reclamation Plan in September 1990, which was later amended in March 1998, July 2013, and again in 2019. The result of the public/agency scoping, comment, and review processes was an approved and expanded mining operation at the CMM, referred to as “Phase I”.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Castle Mountain Venture (CMV) has submitted a proposal for the second expansion of the CMM. The Project is referred to as the “Phase II Expansion.” The Phase II Expansion would extend the mine life by approximately 30 years, with 20 years of mining and processing and 10 years of reclamation. Operations would effectively quadruple the annual mining rate from 18 million tons to 80 million tons. The increased rate would require a total of 2,250 acre-feet per year of groundwater and up to 25 megawatts of power. To meet these demands, CMV would construct a 32-mile water pipeline and a 16.5-mile powerline (Figure 1) from Walking Box Ranch to the second phase of development. Walking Box Ranch is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, owned by the BLM, and managed by the BLM and the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Public Lands Institute. The proposed utilities would be located largely within existing rights-of-way and would cross public land managed by the BLM CA NFO and the BLM NV Las Vegas Field Office (Figure 2). The proposed Project would include the expansion of the mine pits, overburden sites, and heap leach pad, all within the existing Approved Project Area (APA). The APA, shown in Figure 2, was previously approved by the BLM and the County. The Project would also include the installation of the associated pipeline and powerline, which would disturb an additional 1,800 acres of BLM land outside of the APA, for a total project disturbance of 3,294 acres.

CMM's access road was approved under the mine's original BLM Plan of Operations (CACA-031137) in 1990. When the California Desert Protection Act of 1994 established the Mojave National Preserve, it inadvertently included 1,000 feet of the mine's access road and proposed utilities. CMV has proposed a realignment of the mine's access road that avoids the Preserve but would disturb 5 acres of BLM land. The National Park Service will participate in the NEPA/CEQA process and will assist BLM in selecting the preferred road alignment.

The proposed expansion includes:

- Extending the mine life by approximately 30 years, with 20 years of mining and processing and 10 years of reclamation.
- Quadrupling the annual mining rate from 18 million tons to 80 million tons.
- Increasing the total land disturbance by an additional 1,800 acres.
- Increasing mining by an additional 296 million tons.
- Increasing overburden stockpiling by an additional 196 million tons.
- Increasing crushing rate from 6 million to 19 million tons per year.
- Increasing power usage to 25 megawatts of power per year.
- Increasing groundwater use by an additional 1,625-acre feet per year:
 - 830 to 1,340 acre-feet per year would be supplied from wells at the mine site within Lanfair Valley Groundwater Basin
 - 830 to 1,340-acre feet per year would be supplied via a pipeline from wells within the adjacent Ivanpah Valley Groundwater Basin
 - ~8% reduction in flow at Piute Springs (riparian habitat and ecological reserve).

- Expanding and deepening open pits to more than 400 ft. below the water table.
- Employing up to 500 temporary and 400 permanent workers.
- Creating an open pit lake, which will remain as a permanent land feature.

EIS/EIR SCOPE

The Joint EIS/EIR will assess the effects of the Project on the environment, identify potentially significant impacts, identify feasible mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate potentially significant environmental impacts, and discuss potentially feasible alternatives to the Project that may accomplish the Project Objectives while lessening or eliminating any potentially significant Project impacts.

Because the County and the BLM have already determined that a Joint EIS/EIR is required for the proposed Project, and as permitted by CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(d) (Preliminary Review), the County and the BLM will not prepare an Initial Study for the Project. The Project's potential environmental effects are listed below. The County and the BLM welcome public input during the NOP review period.

Potential Environmental Effects/Topics to Be Evaluated:

Based on preliminary surveys and information, the County and the BLM have identified the following main subject areas for analysis in the Joint EIR/EIS. The Joint EIR/EIS will consider impacts associated with construction and ongoing operation. The scope of environmental analysis could be modified based on input from this NOP, the NOI, project scoping, or the project development process. Environmental effects anticipated for study include, but are not limited to:

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • Aesthetics | • Greenhouse Gas Emissions | • Public Services |
| • Agriculture and Forestry | • Hazards & Hazardous Materials | • Recreation |
| • Air Quality | • Hydrology / Water Quality | • Transportation/Traffic |
| • Biological Resources | • Land Use / Planning | • Tribal Cultural Resources |
| • Cultural Resources | • Mineral Resources | • Utilities / Service Systems |
| • Energy | • Noise | • Wildfire |
| • Geology/Soils | • Population / Housing | • Cumulative Impacts |

The Joint EIS/EIR will also address NEPA-required issues such as compliance with applicable federal executive orders and federal regulations (e.g., Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act).

The Project plans and technical studies supporting the Project analysis are available at <https://lus.sbcounty.gov/planning-home-2/environmental/desert-region/>.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC REVIEW AND COMMENT

A responsible agency under CEQA is defined as a public agency other than the lead agency, which has permitting authority or approval power over some aspect of the overall project. This Notice provides a description of the Project and solicits comments from responsible agencies, trustee agencies, federal, state, and local agencies, and other interested parties on the scope and content of the environmental document to be prepared to analyze the environmental impacts of the Project.

Comments received in response to this Notice will be reviewed and considered by the Lead Agencies in determining the scope of the Joint EIS/EIR. Due to time limits, as defined by NEPA and CEQA, your response should be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than thirty (30) days after publication of this Notice. We need input from your agency as to the scope and content of the environmental information that is germane to your agency's statutory responsibilities in connection with the Project. Your agency may need to use the Joint EIS/EIR prepared by our agency when considering your permit or other approval for the Project.

Public Comment Period: October 17, 2025, to November 20, 2025

Please send your responses and comments before the closing business day, November 20, 2025, to Derek Newland, Planner II at Derek.Newland@lus.sbcounty.gov or at the following address:

Derek Newland, Planner II
San Bernardino County
Land Use Services Department – Planning Division
385 North Arrowhead Avenue, First Floor
San Bernardino, CA 92415-0187

Document Availability:

This Notice of Preparation and the Project's plans and technical studies can be viewed on the San Bernardino County website at: <https://lus.sbcounty.gov/planning-home-2/environmental/desert-region/>. These documents are also available during regular business hours at: San Bernardino County Land Use Services Department, Planning Division, 385 North Arrowhead Avenue, San Bernardino, CA 92415, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

The County and the BLM will hold one hybrid (in-person and virtual) scoping meeting for the Project in order to receive comments on the scope and content of the Joint EIS/EIR. You are welcome to attend the scoping meeting either in person or virtually using the Zoom link provided below, and present information that you believe should be considered in the Joint EIS/EIR. The scoping meeting is scheduled as follows:

Location: Searchlight Community Center
Address: 200 Michael Wendell Way, Searchlight, Nevada 89046
Date: November 5, 2025
Time: 5:00 p.m. -7:00 p.m.
Zoom Link: https://swca.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_zeQzIFgNTc60OBGUVJLSMg

If you require additional information, please contact Derek Newland, Planner II, at Derek.Newland@lus.sbcounty.gov.

Figure 1. Vicinity Map

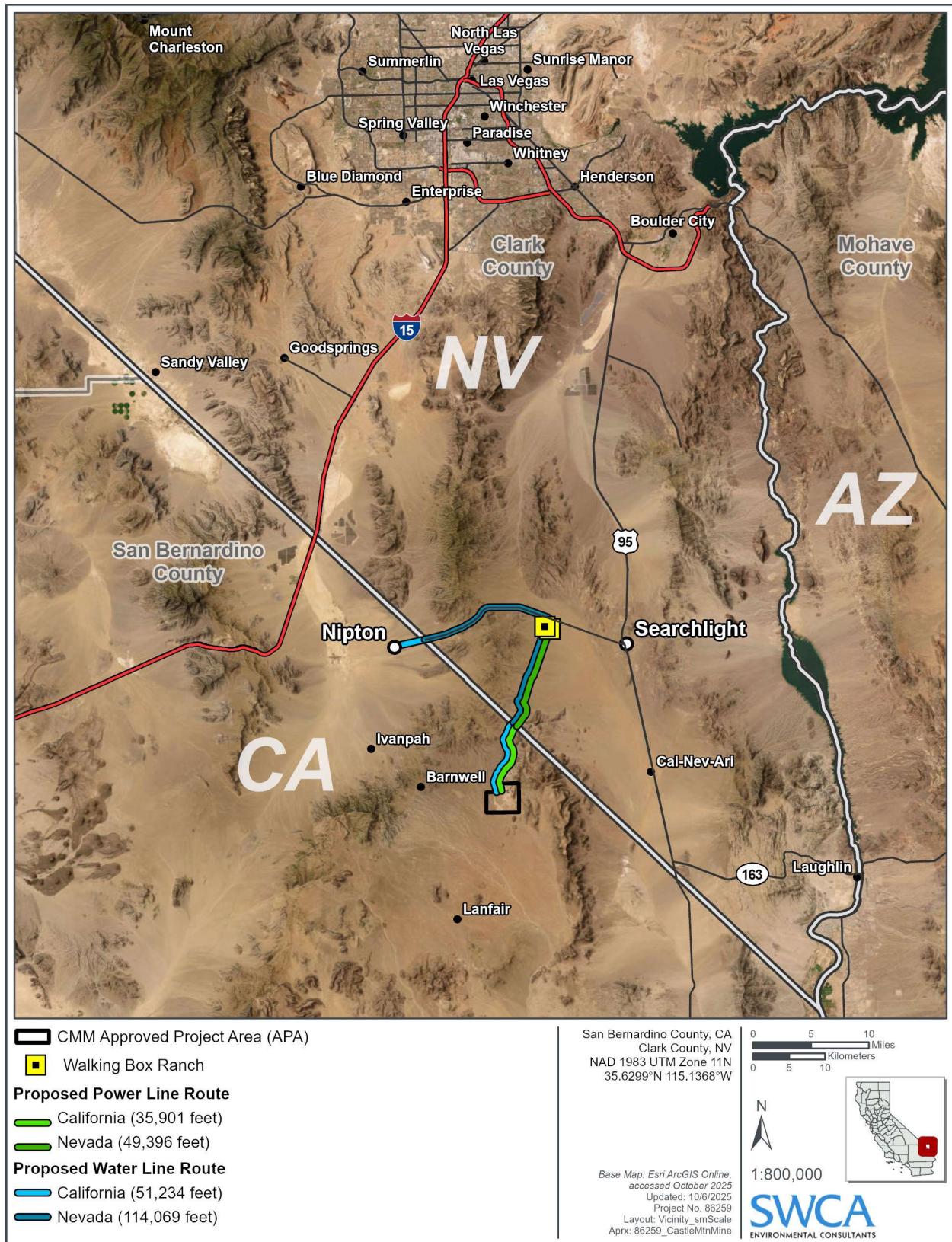


Figure 2. Approved Project Area with Proposed Power and Water Lines

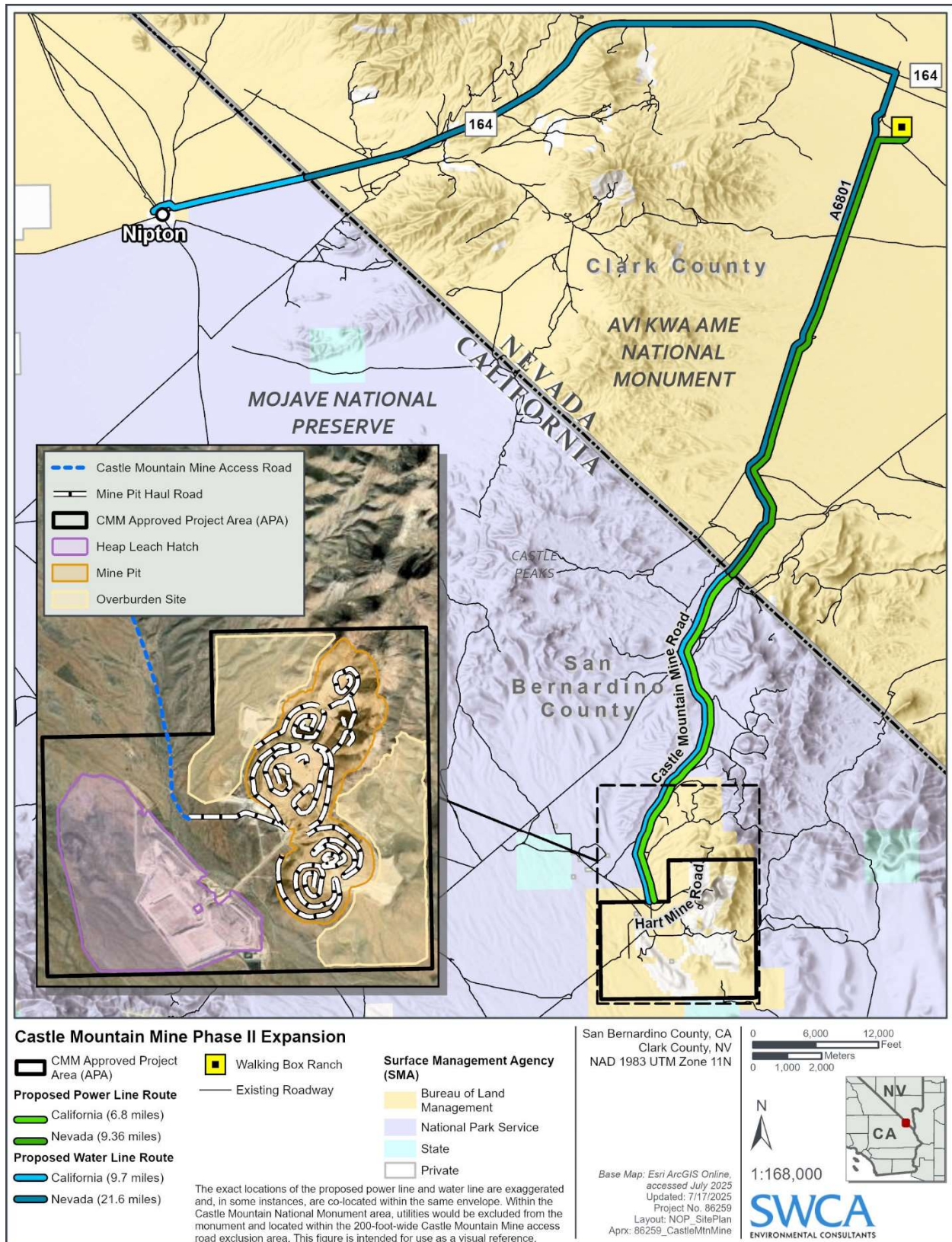


Figure 3. CMM Site Plan

