MODOC COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
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PROPOSED MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION
SURPRISE VALLEY GEOTHERMAL EXPLORATION PROJECT
Use Permit 2025-02

Subject: Surprise Valley Geothermal Exploration Project (UP 2025-02) Initial Study

Project Description: The Applicant proposes to develop up to eleven geothermal test wells southwest of Upper Alkali Lake, and 1.85 miles north of Lake City within the Surprise Valley region of Modoc County. Specifically, the Project involves the development of up to eleven geothermal test wells on nine well pads drilled to a depth of 3,000-5,000 feet. During installation, each well pad would accommodate a drilling rig, support equipment, portable bathroom, baker tanks, and project vehicles. Well testing would consist of flowing the exploration well into baker tanks stationed on the well pad and monitoring the captured geothermal fluid for temperatures, pressures, flow rates, chemistry and other parameters. Three new access roads would be developed to access well pads. The proposed access roads would stem off from Surprise Valley Road to the well pads. Existing access roads may require improvements to accommodate transportation of well and drilling equipment. Improved roads may be widened and surfaced as needed.

Primary access to the general Project area is provided by Surprise Valley Road which travels north and south through or adjacent to Project parcels. Existing agricultural roads stemming from Surprise Valley Road provide access to individual well pad development sites and will be improved as necessary to accommodate the proposed development. Up to 1.2 miles of new access roads would be developed to provide direct access to the well pads.

Project Location and Setting: The proposed facilities would be located within the Lake City USGS quadrangle in sections 12, 13, and 24 Township 44 north Range 15 east; on APN 026-080-018; APN: 026-100-004; APN 026-100-014; APN 026-100-006; and APN 026-100-008. The proposed development areas are leased to the Applicant by various private landowners. The Project area is relatively flat and presently used for the production of alfalfa or associated agricultural facilities.

The well pads would occur in areas designated as Prime Farmland, Farmland of Statewide Importance, Farmland of local importance or Grazing land by the California Department of Conservation (CDOC). The Project parcels are zoned as Unclassified and general land use designation is Exclusive Agriculture or Exclusive Agriculture/ General Agriculture. APN 026-100-004-000, APN 026-080-009-000, APN 026-100-014, APN 026-100-008, and APN 032-030-001 are under Williamson Act contracts.

The Project area is located in a Known Geothermal Resource Area (KGRA) as Lake City-Surprise Valley 1 (California Energy Commission, 2020), and Surprise Valley is identified as a geothermal resource area in the County of Modoc 1998 General Plan (Update 2018). Geothermal prospecting in this area has taken place since 1951, and the region has been designated as a KGRA by USGS since 1974 (Warner Mountain Energy Corporation, 2023). While exploration has occurred in this region since its designation as a KGRA, no commercial development of geothermal energy resources has occurred.

Findings and Determination

The County of Modoc (County) conducted an Initial Study (attached), which determined that the proposed project could have significant environmental effects. The project avoids or mitigates the potentially significant environmental effects identified, and the preparation of an environmental impact report will not be required. There is no substantial evidence, in light of the whole record before the County, that the project may have a significant effect on the environment. The determination is based on the attached Initial Study and the following findings.

a) The Project will not degrade environmental quality, substantially reduce habitat, cause a wildlife population to drop below self-sustaining levels, reduce the number or restrict the range of special-status species, or eliminate important examples of California history or prehistory.
b) The Project does not have the potential to achieve short-term, to the disadvantage of long-term, environmental goals.
c) The Project will not have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable.
d) The Project will not have environmental effects that will cause substantial adverse effects on human beings, either directly or indirectly.
e) No substantial evidence exists that the Project will have a negative or adverse effect on the environment.
f) The Project incorporates all applicable mitigation measures identified in the Initial Study.
g) This Mitigated Negative Declaration reflects the independent judgement of the lead agency.

Documentation

The attached Initial Study documents the reasons to support the above determination.

Mitigation Measures

See attached Initial Study.

Public Review Distribution

Draft copies or notice of this Mitigated Negative Declaration were distributed to:

California Air Resources Control Board (CARB)
California Department of Conservation (DOC)
California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)
California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC)
California Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB)
Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI)
Modoc County (Air Quality, Environmental Health)
Modoc County Clerk
Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC)
Office of Historic Preservation
State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB)
US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE)
US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

Public Review

(X) Draft document referred for comments on July 1, 2026.

( ) No comments were received during the public review period.

Sincerely,

Sean Curtis

Sean Curtis, Planning Director
Modoc County