UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR CONSTRUCTION AND OPERATION OF A SOLAR PHOTOVOLTAIC SYSTEM AT NAVAL AIR FACILITY EL CENTRO, CALIFORNIA

Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] Parts 1500-1508) implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) NEPA regulations (32 CFR Part 775), and Chief of Naval Operations Manual-5090.1, the Navy gives notice that an Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required for the construction and operation of a solar photovoltaic (PV) system at Naval Air Facility (NAF) El Centro, California.

Proposed Action: The project is needed to increase Navy installation energy security, operational capability, strategic flexibility, and resource availability through the development of renewable energy generating assets at Navy installations by the construction and operation of a solar PV system.

A solar PV system would be developed to generate renewable energy at NAF El Centro based on the Navy's Renewable Energy Initiative's acquisition strategy of Model 2, Model 3, or a combination of Models 2 and 3. Under a Model 2 acquisition strategy, the Navy and a local electric utility provider (Provider) would enter into an agreement to allow the Provider to use Navy land to construct, operate, and own the PV systems. The Navy would receive compensation for the lease, but would not directly receive the power generated by the PV system. Under a Model 3 acquisition strategy, the Navy would enter into a similar agreement plus a Power Purchase Agreement. Once the systems are operational, the Navy would purchase and use all of the electricity generated from the systems. There is also a possibility that a combination of Models 2 and 3 would be implemented; where some power generated would be used by the Navy and some by outside customers.

The Navy has identified three sites on which to develop solar PV facilities under the Proposed Action. Parcel 1 is a 15-acre site located on vacant land in the west-central portion of NAF El Centro. Parcel 1 is occasionally used as an overflow parking lot when special events (e.g., Blue Angels performances) require additional visitor parking capacity. Parcel 2 is a 30-acre site located on vacant land north of Havens Road and west of A Street in the southwest portion of NAF El Centro near the base entrance. Parcel 2 was previously leased as an agricultural plot but is currently in a maintenance status. Parcel 3 is a 26-acre site located south of 8th Street and east of A Street in the southern portion of NAF El Centro near the base entrance. Parcel 3 is currently used for agricultural purposes.

The combined size of the three sites is approximately 71 acres, and the proposed PV systems would generate approximately 13 megawatts of renewable energy. The PV system would connect to the public electrical grid via an existing substation near the southwest corner of NAF El Centro. The Provider would develop a conceptual design that allows for the most efficient placement and configuration of PV panels on each site.

Once the systems are operational, the Provider would be responsible for maintenance and operation of the facilities. The Provider would also be responsible for the decommissioning of the facilities and restoration of the sites to existing conditions at the end of the agreement period. Construction of the PV systems would begin in 2015 or 2016, and would require 9 to 10 months for completion.

Public Participation: The public participation process included the publication of a Notice of Availability of the Draft EA in the Imperial Valley Press from February 20-22, 2015. A copy of the Draft EA was also available for public review at the El Centro Public Library and on the Navy Region Southwest website http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrsw/om/environmental_support/Public_Review_of_Navy_Projects/NAFEC_Solar_Photovoltaic_EA.html. The Navy received letters from the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) and the Imperial Chamber of Commerce. The IID letter noted that the Proposed Action had the potential to affect IID

infrastructure, resources and rights-of-way; and that site access coordination, permitting and impact mitigation would the responsibility of the entity who would construct and operate the system. The Imperial Chamber of Commerce noted in their letter that they preferred that the Navy allowed agriculture to continue on outleased sites, and that solar PV development occur on other unused land parcels. A 15-day public review and comment period was provided from February 20 through March 9, 2015. No public comments were received on the Draft EA. A Notice of Availability of the Final EA and FONSI will be published in the Imperial Valley Press newspaper and copies of the documents will be placed in the library and at http://www.cnic.navy.mil/regions/cnrsw/om/environmental_support/Public_Review_of_Navy_Projects/NAFEC_Solar_Photovoltaic_EA.html.

Alternatives Analyzed: The EA analyzed the Proposed Action (as described above) and the No-Action Alternative. Under the No-Action Alternative, a PV system would not be constructed or operated at NAF El Centro, and NAF El Centro would not contribute toward the Navy's goal of developing one gigawatt of renewable energy generation capacity by the end of 2015. Land use at the three sites considered for solar PV development would remain unchanged.

Alternative to be Implemented: The Proposed Action is selected for implementation as it best meets the purpose and need for the project and would not result in significant impacts to the human and natural environment.

Existing Conditions:

NAF El Centro is located in a predominately agricultural area south of the Salton Sea, and is approximately 117 miles east of San Diego, California. It provides for realistic training for active and reserve military, other U.S. forces, and allied units. Squadrons visit NAF El Centro and its associated ranges to practice gunnery, bombing, carrier landings and air combat. NAF El Centro has two operating runways, as well as support facilities and housing.

NAF El Centro is located in Imperial County, within the Salton Sea Air Basin. The air quality in Imperial County has been Federally characterized as being in marginal non-attainment for ozone, serious non-attainment for PM_{10}, and moderate non-attainment for $PM_{2.5}$. The State of California has designated Imperial County as being in non-attainment for ozone and PM_{10}, and unclassified/attainment for all other criteria pollutants.

Although several Federally and California listed threatened or endangered species have been documented in the larger area that encompasses NAF El Centro, none of these species have been documented on the installation itself. The western burrowing owl (a California species of special concern) has been observed at all three project parcels. During western burrowing owl surveys that were conducted in 2014, active owl burrows were observed on the northwest portion of Parcel 1, along the southern edge of Parcel 2, and along the southern edge of Parcel 3.

Environmental Effects and Impact Minimization Measures:

Air Quality: Construction activities of the Proposed Action would generate temporary (short-term) air emissions, such as fugitive dust emissions from earth moving activities and exhaust emissions from construction equipment and vehicles. Minor amounts of fugitive dust and exhaust emissions would be generated by the operation of ground vehicles during periodic maintenance of the solar PV systems. Emission reductions realized by reduced consumption of grid-supplied electricity would more than offset the short-term construction emissions within the first year of operation. Long-term operation of the solar PV systems would also avoid potential emissions produced from conventional non-renewable energy generating sources in the project areas. Total construction and operation emissions would be below de minimis thresholds. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in significant impacts to air quality.

Biological Resources: Long-term impacts from removal of vegetation for project construction would be minor and would occur in previously disturbed areas. The proposed action would have no effect on Federally or California listed species because

there is no suitable habitat within the project sites for these species. Impacts to other wildlife would be minor due to the relatively small size of the project sites, the level of previous disturbance on the sites, and the amount of habitat available in surrounding areas. Burrowing owls have been documented on each of the project sites. Standard measures to protect burrowing owls and their burrows (e.g., limitation of construction and maintenance to non-breeding season) would be implemented to minimize impacts to burrowing owls. Therefore, no significant impacts to biological resources would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Land Use and Air Space. A land use change from agricultural to renewable energy development for up to 37 years would be compatible with the adjacent uses on NAF El Centro and with the planned land use for the sites as designated by the NAF El Centro Master Plan. Implementation of the Proposed Action would not result in any changes to use or control of airspace near NAF El Centro. Therefore, no significant impacts to land use or airspace would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice. The Proposed Action would not cause an increase in military or civilian populations, or place any additional request upon local housing or public services. While 56 acres of agricultural outlease would be discontinued, this represents a small portion of the total acreage farmed, and would not result in job losses for agricultural workers. Approximately 60 full time equivalent workers would be employed for the approximately 9 to 10 month construction period, resulting in a positive effect on local employment. Therefore, no significant impacts to socioeconomics would result from implementation of the Proposed Action. The Navy has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause disproportionately high and adverse health or environmental effects on any minority or low-income populations. The Navy has determined that there are no environmental health and safety risks associated with the Proposed Action that would disproportionately affect children. Therefore, no significant

impacts in regard to Environmental Justice would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Utilities. No adverse impacts to natural gas services, potable water supply, wastewater treatment systems, or solid waste disposal facilities would result from implementation of the Proposed Action. Under Acquisition Models 2, 3, or a combination of 2 and 3, the electricity generated would help the Navy achieve its renewable energy goals, and would result in long-term decreases in greenhouse gas emissions. Under Model 3, or a combination of Models 2 and 3, the Proposed Action would also lower NAF El Centro's demand on local utilities. Therefore, no significant impacts to utilities would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Visual Quality. While on-installation residents and workers could have views of project construction, the project would not be easily visible to off-installation sensitive viewers (e.g. residents, motorists, and pedestrians). On-installation personnel would experience views consistent with the industrial nature of the area and/or would experience only partial views of the PV systems from behind a retaining wall separating on-installation housing from the proposed project site. Therefore, no significant impacts to visual resources would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Water Resources. Construction activities associated with the Proposed Action would not degrade local water quality or adversely affect current uses of local surface water resources. The Proposed Action would not require any temporary or permanent structures that would increase the potential for localized flooding. Water used for the cleaning of solar PV panels during project operation would be brought in by truck; groundwater resources would not be used. Therefore, no significant impacts to water resources would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Public Health and Safety. No Installation Restoration Program sites would be disturbed by implementation of the Proposed Action. All project-related work would comply with requirements for hazardous materials and wastes. Electric field and magnetic

flux levels near solar PV systems would be well below recommended levels for human health and would not interfere with communications systems. No hazardous glare conditions are predicted for the Air Traffic Control Tower or the standard fixed-wing aircraft approach routes on the 08/26 and 12/30 runways. The only glare effects predicted are for a helicopter approach route passing between Parcels 2 and 3, heading north from the main gate. This glare would not result in hazards to pilots or interference with airfield operations. Additionally, final design of the solar PV panels could include adjustments to eliminate glare on this helicopter approach route. While solar PV panels could attract birds, the panels would not be located adjacent to runways, and would not result in increased rates of bird-aircraft collisions. Therefore, no significant impacts to public health and safety would result from implementation of the Proposed Action.

Finding: Based on the analysis presented in the EA, the Navy finds that implementation of the Proposed Action will not significantly impact the quality of the human or natural environment or generate significant controversy.

The EA prepared by the Navy addressing this action is on file, and interested parties may obtain a copy by contacting Ms. Amy Kelley, Project Manager, Naval Facilities Engineering Command Southwest, 1220 Pacific Highway, San Diego, California 92132, or email NAVFAC_SW_NEPA_EnvCore_PublicComments@navy.mil.

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Date

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