



Item 4: Opt-In Certification: Darden Clean Energy Project (Docket 23-OPT-02)

June 11, 2025, Business Meeting

Kaycee Chang, Supervisor, CEQA Project Management Unit
Siting, Transmission, and Environmental Protection Division



Opt-In Certification Benefits

- Provides the CEC a new permitting authority as the CEQA lead agency
- Provides developers an alternative permitting pathway
- Enhances grid reliability
- Ensures benefits to the community and local government
- Conducts regular inspections and compliance checks



Solar photovoltaic or terrestrial wind



Energy storage systems



Stationary power plants using non-fossil energy



Specific manufacturing or assembly facilities for clean energy

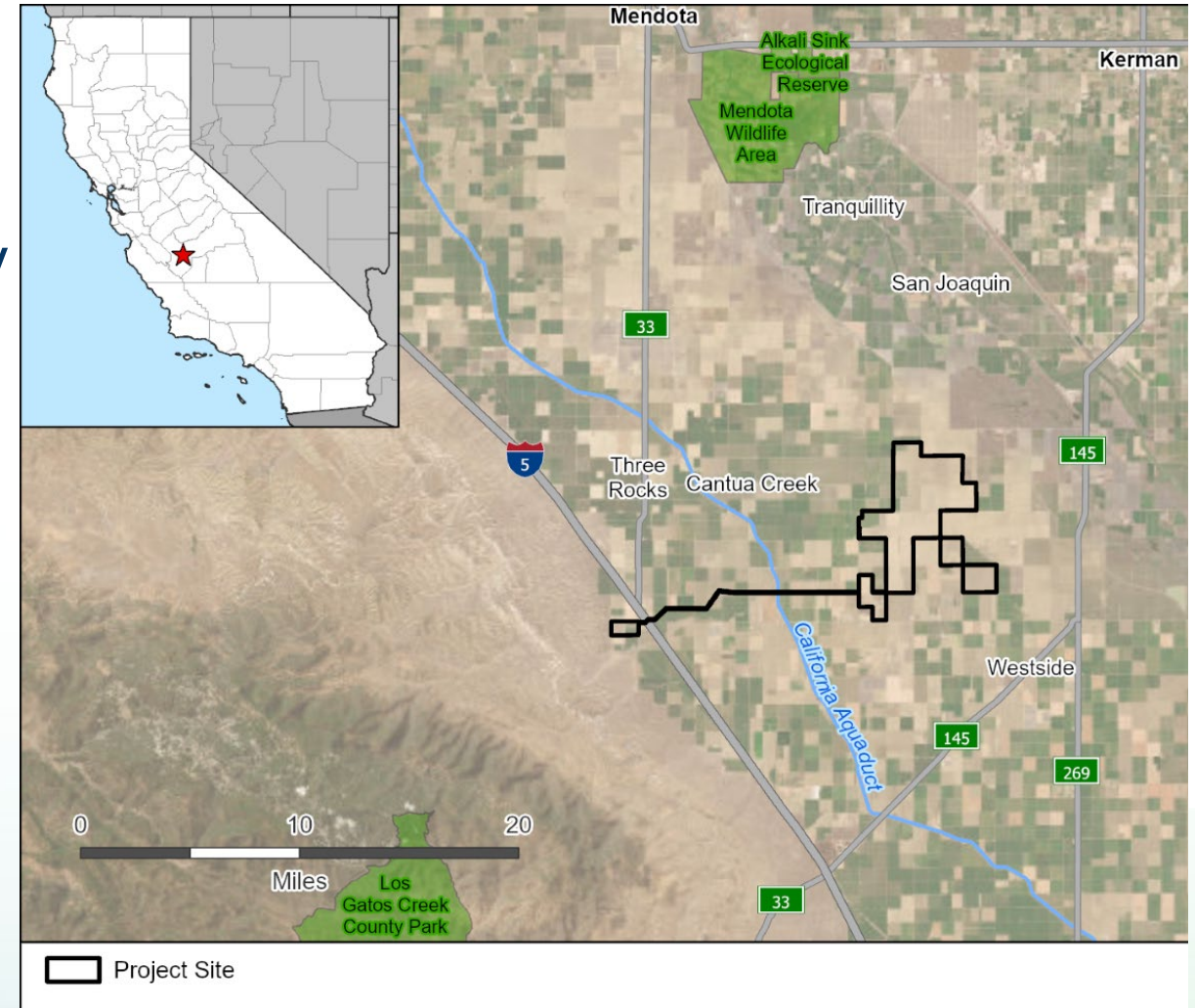


Hydrogen production facilities



Darden Clean Energy Project

- 2.3 GW project
- Project Components
 - 1,150 MW solar photovoltaic facility
 - Up to 1,150 MW battery energy storage system
 - 500 kV Substation
 - Generation-intertie line
 - PG&E Switchyard
- Unincorporated Fresno County
- Approximately 9,500 acres



Source: Rincon Consultants, Inc.



Project Timeline

Date	Project Milestones
November 9, 2023	Developer Filed Application
September 19, 2024	Issued Determination of Complete Application
October 16, 2024	Held Public Information and Scoping Meeting
February 18, 2025	Published Staff Assessment (including Draft Environmental Impact Report)
March 26, 2025	Held Public Meeting on Staff Assessment
May 12, 2025	Published Updated Staff Assessment (including Final Environmental Impact Report)
June 11, 2025	Present Project Findings at Business Meeting
TBD	File Notice of Commission Decision



Updated Staff Assessment Findings

- Conforms with Laws, Ordinances, Regulations, Standards (LORS)
- Meets Opt-In Mandatory Project Requirements

Opt-In Mandatory Project Requirement	Finding
1. Pays Prevailing Wage for a Covered Project Under the California Labor Code	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Requirement met with condition of certification
2. Provides a Net Positive Economic Benefit to the Local Government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Requirement met, supported by substantial evidence in the record of \$169 million potential
3. Signed a Community Benefits Agreement that is Legally Binding and Enforceable	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Requirement met, supported by substantial evidence in the record



Updated Staff Assessment Continued

Preparation of Environmental Impact Report (EIR) per the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

- EIR included within Updated Staff Assessment
- Mitigation Measures reduce all impacts to Less than Significant
- Conditions of Certification serve as Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program



Additional Conditions of Certification and Compliance Verifications

Community Benefits Agreements

CBA-1

Fulfill obligations in community benefits agreements

CBA-2

Provide progress reports regarding implementation of Darden Project Local Investment Program



Revised Condition of Certification and Compliance Verification

WORKER SAFETY-12

- Reach one or more agreements with Fresno County Fire Protection District (FCFPD) or arbitration
- Condition sunsets if property tax exclusion expires
- Agreements can separately address construction and operations funding
- Develop a schedule in coordination with FCFPD
- Funding must not delay project construction or operation



Attachment A – Errata Sheet #1

Clarifies and corrects typographical, factual, and/or technical errors in the Updated Staff Assessment.

- Example: Page 1-1 of the Updated Staff Assessment

The Staff Assessment is hereby incorporated by reference into this document.



Staff Recommendation

Approve the Order to:

1. Certify Final EIR and Completeness of Record of Proceedings.
2. Make findings as proposed in Updated Staff Assessment and certify eligibility under the Opt-In Certification Program.
3. Adopt Staff Conditions of Certification and recommended mitigation measures.
4. Issue the Darden Clean Energy Project a certificate to construct and operate the clean energy facility.