3.1.6 Paleontological Resources

This section discusses potential impacts to paleontological resources resulting from implementation of the Proposed Project. The analysis is based on a review of existing paleontological resources, technical data, and applicable laws, regulations, and guidelines.

3.1.6.1 Existing Conditions

This section summarizes the existing paleontological resources at each individual solar farm, as well as the Tierra del Sol gen-tie alignment. The methodology and assumptions used to conduct the paleontological resources analysis of the Proposed Project are provided. The LanEast and LanWest solar farms are analyzed at a program level in this Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) because sufficient project information for a project-level analysis is not available.

Paleontological resources are the remains and/or traces of prehistoric life, exclusive of human remains, and include the localities where fossils were collected and the sedimentary rock formations from which they were obtained/derived. The defining character of fossils is their geologic age. Fossils or fossil deposits are generally regarded as older than 10,000 years, the generally accepted temporal boundary marking the end of the last Late Pleistocene glacial event and the beginning of the current period of climatic amelioration of the Holocene (County of San Diego 2007).

A unique paleontological resource is any fossil or assemblage of fossils, or paleontological resource site or formation that meets any one of the following criteria:

- Is the best example of its kind locally or regionally.
- Illustrates a paleontological or evolutionary principle (e.g., faunal succession; plant or animal relationships).
- Provides a critical piece of paleobiological data (illustrates a portion of geologic history or provides evolutionary, paleoclimatic, paleoecological, paleoenvironmental, or biochronological data).
- Encompasses any part of a "type locality" of a fossil or formation.
- Contains a unique or particularly unusual assemblage of fossils.
- Occupies a unique position stratigraphically within a formation.
- Occupies a unique position, proximally, distally or laterally within a formation's extent or distribution (County of San Diego 2007).

Tierra del Sol, Rugged, LanEast, LanWest, Proposed Project

Based on the County of San Diego geographic information system (GIS), Tierra del Sol, Rugged, LanEast, LanWest, and the combined Proposed Project are located in the plutonic igneous geologic formation which has a zero sensitivity rating for fossils.

3.1.6.2 Applicable Plans and Policies

State Regulations

CEQA

CEQA requires lead agencies to carefully consider the potential effects of a project on unique paleontological resources. CEQA requires an assessment of impacts associated with the direct or indirect destruction of unique paleontological resources or sites that are of value to the region or State.

Local Regulations

County of San Diego General Plan — Conservation and Open Space Element

The following goals and policies identified in the County of San Diego General Plan (August 2011) Conservation and Open Space Element are applicable to the Proposed Project:

- **Goal COS-9: Education and Scientific Uses.** Paleontological resources and unique geologic features conserved for educational and/or scientific purposes.
    - **Policy COS-9.1: Preservation.** Require the salvage and preservation of unique paleontological resources when exposed to the elements during excavation or grading activities or other development processes.

County of San Diego Grading Ordinance

The Grading Ordinance requires that projects involving grading, clearing, and/or removal of natural vegetation obtain a grading permit, unless the project meets one or more of the exemptions listed in Section 87.202 of the Grading Ordinance. The grading permit is discretionary and requires compliance with CEQA. Section 87.430 of the Grading Ordinance provides that the County official (e.g., permit compliance coordinator) may require a paleontological monitor during all or selected grading operations, to monitor for the presence of paleontological resources. If fossils greater than 12 inches in any dimension are encountered, then all grading operations in the area of discovery shall be suspended immediately and not resumed until authorized by the County official. The ordinance also requires immediate

notification of the County official regarding the discovery. The County official shall determine the appropriate resource recovery operation, which the permittee shall carry out prior to the County official's authorization to resume normal grading operations.

3.1.6.3 Analysis of Project Effects and Determination of Significance

The Proposed Project consists of four renewable energy solar farms in southeastern San Diego County. The following impact analysis has been separated into discussions for each of the four solar farms: Tierra del Sol, Rugged, LanEast, and LanWest, as well as a combined discussion of the Proposed Project as a whole. For the purposes of this Program EIR, the Tierra del Sol and Rugged solar farms are analyzed at a project level, whereas the LanEast and LanWest solar farms are analyzed at a programmatic level as sufficient project-level data has not been developed at this time.

Methodology

The analysis of potential impacts to paleontological resources resulting from implementation of the Proposed Project is based upon a review of the County's Paleontological Resources Maps (County of San Diego 2007). These maps indicate that each component of the Proposed Project is located entirely on plutonic igneous rock and has no potential for producing fossil remains. Therefore, no additional fieldwork or analysis was performed.

Guidelines for the Determination of Significance

For the purposes of this EIR, any of the following will be considered a significant impact to paleontological resources:

Activities are proposed that would directly or indirectly damage a unique paleontological resource or site. A significant impact to paleontological resources may occur as a result of the project, if project-related grading or excavation will disturb the substratum or parent material below the major soil horizons in any paleontologically sensitive area of the County, as shown on the San Diego County Paleontological Resources Potential and Sensitivity Map.

Analysis

The analysis below evaluates potential impacts relative to the potential discovery and disturbance to paleontological resources.

Tierra del Sol

A review of the County's Paleontological Resources Maps indicates that the Tierra del Sol solar farm and gen-tie are located entirely on plutonic igneous rock and has no potential for producing fossil remains. Therefore, impacts to paleontological resources as a result of the Tierra del Sol solar farm and Gen-Tie would be **less than significant.**

Rugged

A review of the County's Paleontological Resources Maps indicates that the Rugged solar farm is located entirely on plutonic igneous rock and has no potential for producing fossil remains. Therefore, impacts to paleontological resources as a result of the Rugged solar farm would be **less than significant.**

LanEast and LanWest

A review of the County's Paleontological Resources Maps indicates that the LanEast and LanWest solar farms are located entirely on plutonic igneous rock and have no potential for producing fossil remains. Impacts to paleontological resources as a result of LanEast and LanWest solar farms would be **less than significant**.

Proposed Project

A review of the County's Paleontological Resources Maps indicates that the Proposed Project sites are located entirely on plutonic igneous rock and have no potential for producing fossil remains. Therefore, impacts to paleontological resources as a result of the Proposed Project would be **less than significant**.

3.1.6.4 Cumulative Impact Analysis

Cumulative projects (Table 1-12) located within the cumulative project area would have the potential to result in a cumulative impact associated with paleontological resources from extensive grading, excavation, or other ground-disturbing activities that are located in an area of high or moderate sensitivity. Cumulative projects on state or public lands would be required to comply with Public Resources Code Section 5097–5097.6 pertaining to impacts to paleontological resources. Other cumulative projects would be regulated by state and local regulations, including CEQA and the County Grading Ordinance.

As discussed in Section 3.1.6.3, the Proposed Project area is not located within a paleontologically sensitive area, per the County's Paleontological Resources Maps, and therefore, the Proposed Project site has no potential for producing fossil remains. Therefore, cumulative impacts from the Proposed Project, in combination with the identified cumulative projects, would be **less than significant**.

3.1.6.5 Conclusion

The Tierra del Sol, Rugged, LanEast, and LanWest sites are not located within a paleontologically sensitive area and have no potential for producing fossil remains. The Proposed Project would not require mitigation because there were no identified significant impacts relative to paleontological resources.