APPENDIX J – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

E.S.1 PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND LOCATION

The Western Area Power Administration's (WAPA's) Proposed Action consists of responding to CDH Vidal, LLC's (Proponent's) request for a large generator interconnection agreement and includes constructing interconnection facilities to be located within the boundaries of Proponent's Vidal Energy Project (Project). The Project is a solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation and battery energy storage facility that would produce up to 160 megawatts (MW) nameplate capacity of solar power and include up to 640 megawatt hours (MWh) of energy storage capacity rate in a battery energy storage system (BESS) on up to approximately 1,090 acres of land. The Vidal Energy Project is proposed to interconnect to the existing, adjacent Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) 161-kilovolt (kV) overhead transmission line. The Vidal Energy Project is a privately owned project that has been issued a conditional use permit by San Bernardino County and evaluated under an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Vidal Energy Project is located near the town of Vidal in San Bernardino County, California on privately owned lands.

The Vidal Energy Project would include the construction of on-site substation facilities, which would collect and convert the power generated on-site for transmission to a new WAPA interconnection switchyard. The Vidal Energy Project's permanent facilities would include PV panels, BESS, fencing, service roads, a power collection system, communication cables, a project substation, and operations and maintenance (O&M) facilities.

WAPA's Proposed Action would include new overhead and underground transmission lines and an electrical interconnection switchyards.

E.S.2 PROJECT PARTICIPANTS AND BACKGROUND

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), a federal power marketing agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), is the lead federal agency for purposes of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review. The Proponent of the Vidal Energy Project is a private solar development company. WAPA is responding to Proponent's request to interconnect the Vidal Energy Project, a proposed photovoltaic (PV) solar plant, to its electrical transmission system. The nearest transmission line to the Vidal Energy Project is the Headgate Rock-Blythe 161-kilovolt (kV) Transmission Line, which is owned and operated by WAPA. Crossing within the southeastern portion of the Vidal Energy Project area, the transmission line runs approximately northeast–southwest. Although the Vidal Energy Project is not part of WAPA's Proposed Action, its potential impacts are presented alongside that of the Proposed Action as part of a comprehensive analysis in this Environmental Assessment (EA).

E.S.3 PUBLIC AND TRIBAL PARTICIPATION

Public scoping to gather input on both the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project was initiated on January 12, 2022. WAPA held a 30-day scoping period that ended on February 17, 2022. Scoping letters were mailed to interested parties and adjacent landowners to inform them of the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project, notify them of the scoping period timeframe and open house, and request input on topics to be evaluated in this Environmental Assessment. Letters were also sent to the following five federally recognized tribes: Chemehuevi Indian Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Mojave Indian Tribe, Quechan Tribe of the Fort Yuma Reservation, and Twenty-Nine Palms Band of Mission Indians.

WAPA accepted scoping comments via telephone, email, and U.S. mail. WAPA received a total of 12 submittals, some of which included multiple comments on environmental resources or topics for analysis.

Submittals were received from 11 individuals, and one tribe (Colorado River Indian Tribes). In total, 15 specific comments were identified from the 12 submittals. Seven comments were of a general nature, including questions about purchasing nearby property. Two comments requested additional information which was provided in the form of a map, and one expressed general support for the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project. The remaining comments requested that the EA address identification and avoidance of Native American sites and cultural resources, socioeconomics, and the NEPA process.

Due to revisions to the Vidal Energy Project, a revised scope for the Proposed Action was submitted to WAPA on September 14, 2023. The revised scope replaced the installation of fiber optic cable along the entirety of WAPA's Headgate Rock-Blythe transmission line with wireless communication infrastructure, thus avoiding ground-disturbing activities outside of the Vidal Energy Project footprint. Since the revised scope reduced the originally anticipated footprint for the Proposed Action, WAPA accepted the revised scope and determined that re-initiation of the public scoping process was not required.

E.S.4 PURPOSE AND NEED

WAPA

WAPA operates and maintains transmission lines and associated facilities in accordance with the Federal Power Act and its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (OATT). WAPA's purpose and need is to respond to Proponent's interconnection request in accordance with the Federal Power Act and its OATT.

Proponent

The primary purpose of the Vidal Energy Project is to utilize property within the County to site solar power-generating facilities and energy storage near existing infrastructure to provide renewable electricity to the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) grid and WAPA and support the state of California's greenhouse gas reduction goals and renewable energy standards.

E.S.5 PROPOSED ACTION

WAPA's Proposed Action consists of approving an interconnection request, entering into an interconnection agreement, and implementing three types (i.e., installation, maintenance, and decommissioning) of project-related transmission system upgrades. WAPA would install, maintain, and decommission a tap on the existing Headgate Rock-Blythe 161 kV transmission line that would lead into a new switchyard that would occupy up to five acres. The interconnection tap would be located entirely within the existing WAPA right-of-way (ROW) and Vidal Energy Project footprint. The tap would consist of approximately 3 to 5 new transmission pole structures connecting the new switchyard to the existing transmission line, all located within the existing ROW and Vidal Solar Project. Underground fiber would be installed along this same path to the take-off structure. Optical Ground Wire (OPGW) would be installed from the take-off structure, along the new overhead approach spans, then coiled up at an existing structure. Additionally, an existing transmission pole closest to the Point of Interconnection (POI) would be replaced with a new tower.

E.S.5 VIDAL ENERGY PROJECT

The Proponent plans to construct, operate, and decommission a 1,090-acre PV and battery energy storage system (BESS) facility to generate renewable energy (Vidal Energy Project). The Vidal Energy Project will provide up to 160 megawatts of alternating current (MW-AC) nameplate capacity renewable energy and would be supported by the existing, adjacent WAPA 161 kV overhead transmission line. The Vidal Energy Project would include the construction of one onsite substation (Project substation) that would collect and convert the power generated onsite for transmission in an overhead or underground line to the WAPA transmission system and interconnection location. The Vidal Energy Project's permanent facilities would

include PV panels, a BESS, fencing, service roads, a power collection system, communication cables, electrical switchyards, a substation that would "step up" the electricity voltage prior to connecting to WAPA's switchyard (the "project substation"), operations and maintenance facilities, and an aerial connection from the new transmission line pole structures and into the new WAPA switchyard to be constructed as part of the Proposed Action. San Bernardino County completed an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) evaluating environmental impacts from the construction, operation, and decommissioning of the Vidal Energy Project and issued a conditional use permit. Although the Vidal Energy Project is not part of the Proposed Action, its impacts will be presented alongside those of the Proposed Action as part of a comprehensive analysis in this EA.

E.S.6 ALTERNATIVES

A No Action Alternative was evaluated to provide a baseline against which the impacts of the Proposed Action can be compared. Under the No Action Alternative, WAPA would not approve an interconnection request, would not enter into an interconnection agreement, and would not implement any project-related transmission system upgrades, additions, or configurations, and Proponent would pursue other interconnection opportunities for the Vidal Energy Project.

E.S.7 SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION'S ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Five resources were evaluated and carried forward for further analysis in Chapter 3: air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic, and visual resources. Additional resources were evaluated for which effects were determined to be negligible, as further described in Section 3.3. Given all environmental studies and impact analyses presented in San Bernardino County's EIR included work to be completed under both Proponent's Vidal Energy Project and WAPA's Proposed Action, unless otherwise noted this EA presents impacts for the entirety of the Vidal Energy Project and the Proposed Action.

Air Quality

This EA collectively evaluates air quality impacts from construction of both the Vidal Energy Project and the Proposed Action and concludes that there would not be a cumulatively considerable net increase of any criteria pollutant for which the region is non-attainment under an applicable Federal or State ambient air quality standard. Construction of the Vidal Energy Project and the Proposed Action would result in the temporary addition of pollutants to the local air basin caused by on-site sources (e.g., off-road construction equipment, soil disturbance, and volatile organic compound off-gassing) and off-site sources (e.g., on-road haul trucks, vendor trucks, and worker vehicle trips) and operations would generate emissions from mobile sources, including vehicle trips from employees commuting to work and maintenance and inspection vehicles. Emissions from this construction period would be temporary and transient in nature and would have negligible impacts on air quality. Emissions from construction, operations and maintenance, and decommissioning of both the Vidal Energy Project and Proposed Action would increase San Bernardino County's annual emissions inventory by less than 0.01% for each pollutant of concern. Given that the Proposed Action represents only a very small portion the activities evaluated, the Proposed Action's contribution to the County's annual emission inventory would be negligible.

None of the analyzed criteria pollutants emissions would exceed the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQMD) annual emissions thresholds during operation of the Vidal Energy Project or the Proposed Action. Decommissioning activities would have similar impacts to construction and are expected to be temporary. The conservation measures proposed in Appendix I would further reduce air quality impacts. The Air Quality Impact Analysis is located in Appendix C.

Biological Resources - Vegetation

During focused plant surveys (details provided in Appendix D), a solitary Utah vine milkweed (California rare plant) was observed in the northwestern portion of the Vidal Energy Project, but outside the area to be disturbed by WAPA's Proposed Action. No other sensitive plant species or sensitive vegetation communities were observed during the survey efforts. WAPA's Proposed Action would contribute up to five acres of permanent ground disturbance within the total 1,090-acre footprint analyzed and authorized by San Bernardino County. Activities associated with operations and maintenance (O&M) of the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project would be infrequent and may cause limited ground disturbance or vegetation removal. Decommissioning would be confined to areas already disturbed during construction and would not lead to any additional ground disturbance. Temporary impacts to native and non-native vegetation are anticipated. Minimal impacts to sensitive plant species would occur with implementation of the conservation measures described in Appendix I.

Biological Resources – Wildlife

During focused surveys no federally or state listed threatened or endangered species were identified, nine sensitive species were determined to have moderate potential for occurrence, and three sensitive species were identified within the Vidal Energy Project site (Appendix D). There would be negligible minor, localized, short- and long-term, direct and indirect, adverse impacts to general and special status terrestrial, avian, and bat species due to construction, O&M, and decommissioning.

There would be a loss of habitat within the Vidal Energy Project area, although the highest quality desert wash habitat (Blue Palo Verde - Ironwood Woodland) would be preserved as described in Appendix I. The loss of wildlife habitat would result in the potential localized loss of shelter, nesting habitat, and forage, and would result in general and special status terrestrial species having to rely on habitat outside of the impacted areas until decommissioning and restoration has been completed. WAPA's Proposed Action would contribute a permanent loss of up to five acres of wildlife habitat within the total 1,090-acre Vidal Energy Project footprint. The Biological Report is located in Appendix D. A Supplemental Wetland Delineation and Joshua Tree inventory Study Report is located in Appendix E.

The combined Vidal Energy Project and Proposed Action impacts to general and special status terrestrial, avian, and bat species will be minimized due to implementation of the measures identified in Appendix I.

Cultural Resources

Ground disturbance activities associated with construction of the WAPA Proposed Action would be limited to permanent disturbance of up to five acres for the proposed switchyard. No ground disturbance from the Proposed Action would occur within the site boundary or within 65 feet of known National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) eligible, recommended-eligible, or indeterminate sites unless conservation measures were implemented as described in Appendix I. No additional impacts on cultural resources are expected from O&M or decommissioning activities.

Within the proposed Vidal Energy Project footprint, which includes the Proposed Action site, 64 cultural sites were recorded. Twenty-one sites are identified as historic-period resources, and 32 are prehistoric resources. These sites were evaluated for eligibility for listing on the NRHP and none were recommended eligible or potentially eligible (Cultural Resources Report, Appendix F). However, regardless of NRHP eligibility, cultural resources important to consulted Native American Tribes could be impacted by the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project. The combined Vidal Energy Project and Proposed Action

impacts to cultural resources will be minimized with an Archaeological Monitoring and Treatment Plan prepared for tribal and agency review and approval as described further in Appendix I.

Visual Resources

There would be approximately 1,090 acres of impacted lands within the Vidal Energy Project, of which the WAPA Proposed Action would contribute up to five acres of impacted landscape that would introduce a slight visual impact with new galvanized steel three-pole structures. The magnitude of change in landscape associated with WAPA's Proposed Action would be minimal due to the proximity of the Proposed Action to existing regional transmission lines supported by H-frame wood pole structures. The scale of the existing WAPA wood pole structures in the area make these features the most visible features throughout the landscape. The WAPA Proposed Action would be visible from Highway 95. Therefore, there would be short- and long-term, minor impacts on the viewshed within 5 miles of WAPA's Proposed Action.

There would be approximately 1,090 acres of impacted lands under the Vidal Energy Project that would reduce the quality visual resources or visual character of the existing environment associated with modification to the existing landscape by the proposed solar facility and ancillary components. The magnitude of change in landscape character associated with the Vidal Energy Project would be minor to moderate due to the scale of the PV solar panel array in comparison to the surrounding landscape, low vegetation, and nearby and adjacent built structures. Although the Vidal Energy Project would alter the existing character of the area, the introduction of project components would not substantially obstruct or interrupt views of surrounding mountainous terrain. All occupied residences, as well as U.S. Highway 95, are located west of the project between the mountain foothills and the project. Additionally, the project site is adjacent to regional transmission lines supported by H-frame wood pole structures. Therefore, the proposed project is consistent with existing views in the surrounding area. Compliance with Renewable Energy & Conservation Element Policies RE-4.1 and RE-4.4 and implementation of the design elements, BMPs, and conservation measures described in Appendix I would minimize the combined Vidal Energy Project and Proposed Action impacts to visual resources during construction, O&M, and decommissioning of the proposed Vidal Energy Project.

Environmental Justice

Low-income and minority populations are present within the vicinity of the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project area; however, according to census information for the State of California, the proportion of the population representing a minority community in San Bernardino County and the Colorado River Indian Tribe's (CRIT's) reservation area is within the median range of minority populations for the broader State. Therefore, development within this area would not have the potential to pose an undue burden to minority populations.

Segments of the population within the vicinity of the Proposed Action and Vidal Energy Project are below median income, particularly on the CRIT land, however, any development in this area would be limited to replacement or upgrade of infrastructure which would ensure long term security and functionality of the lines and further protect adjacent populations from outages or other reliability events. Additionally, WAPA would employ six- to nine-person crews to make repairs, as needed, to maintain the reliability and safety of the bulk electric system. Further, implementation of the Project would not restrict the CRIT or other potential proponents from developing projects in the future. Neither low-income nor minority populations would be disproportionately impacted by the Proposed Action or Vidal Energy Project.

Resources Considered But Not Further Evaluated

Resource issues dismissed from further evaluation — either because they are not present in the affected area or because only negligible impacts would occur — are discussed in Section 3.3 and comprise the following categories:

- Agriculture / Prime and Unique Farmlands
- Climate Change
- Fire and Fuels Management
- Geology and Mineral Resources
- Indian Trust Assets
- Intentional Destructive Acts
- Invasive and Noxious Weeds
- Land Use
- Livestock Grazing / Rangeland Health / Wild Horses and Burros
- Military and Civilian Aviation
- Noise
- Public Health and Safety
- Recreation
- Soils
- Special Management Areas, including Wilderness and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern
- Surface Waters, including floodplains and wetlands
- Transportation