



County of Monterey

Board of Supervisors
Chambers
168 W. Alisal St., 1st Floor
Salinas, CA 93901

Board Report

File #: 18-280, Version: 1

1. Status report on RMA ground-mounted photovoltaic permitting

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors:

- a. Receive a status report on ground-mounted photovoltaic permitting conducted by the Resource Management Agency (RMA).

DISCUSSION:

The Alternative Energy and Environment Committee received a report from RMA at its September 28th, 2017 meeting regarding photovoltaic permitting. The Committee requested that RMA gather further information on ground-mounted photovoltaic energy system construction permitting and report its findings specific to the following areas:

- Total number of ground-mounted photovoltaic energy system permits
- Number of permits issued by location
- Average length of time for permitting process
- Information pertaining to eliminating, waiving, or expediting the archaeological assessment for ground-mounted photovoltaic energy systems

This report responds to the Committee's research request and provides information pertaining to an analysis of all construction permits initialized in the last five years (2013-2018).

The analysis showed that 300 ground-mounted photovoltaic energy systems have been received and reviewed by the RMA since 2013. Of these, 215 permits have been finalized, and 31 permits are currently in an active, issued status or are ready-to-issue. At the time of writing, an additional 16 permits are in applied status while 38 are expired, withdrawn or voided.

A geographic analysis of ground-mounted photovoltaic energy system permit applications revealed that 80 of these applications came from the unincorporated area of Salinas, 26.7% of the total. 39 permits, 13% of the total, came from the Carmel area. An additional 35 permits, or 11.7%, came from Carmel Valley. Communities south of Salinas along Route 101 -specifically King City, Soledad, Chualar, and Gonzales - accounted for 82 of the permits, 27.3% of the total. Communities in the south of the county, here described as Greenfield, Parkfield, Bradley, Lockwood, San Miguel, San Lucas, and Jolon, totaled 56 permits, or 18.6% of the total. The wide distribution from which applications originate demonstrates County-wide interest in ground-mounted photovoltaic energy.

The average time in possession for the ground-mounted photovoltaic energy systems permits for which this data is available is 155.65 hours or approximately 19.5 business days.

Regarding information pertaining to eliminating, waiving, or expediting the archaeological assessment for ground-mounted photovoltaic energy systems, there are two policy standards, one which applies to the inland areas of the county and one which applies to the coastal areas. Below is information pertaining to both of these areas.

Inland Areas:

In April of 2015, the Board of Supervisors adopted Section 21.66.050 of the Monterey County Code, establishing new standards for the protection of archaeological and tribal cultural resources in the inland areas as part of the 2010 General Plan implementation.

Under Section 21.66.050.C.2.d.iv., the archaeological report requirements for “Small ground-mounted photovoltaic systems” is waived except in circumstances where a project is located within two hundred fifty (250) feet of known archaeological resources, or where evidence exists that archaeological resources may be present on the site.

Based on the adopted zoning regulations most small ground-mounted photovoltaic systems in the inland areas do not require archaeological investigations. The waiver criteria do not apply to larger photovoltaic systems and facilities.

Coastal Areas:

In the Coastal Zone, criteria for archaeological report waivers are established in four different Coastal Implementation Plans (Del Monte Forest, Carmel, North County, and Big Sur). Each Coastal Implementation Plan is slightly different, however all require preparation of an archaeological report for all projects that are proposed in areas of “High” or “Moderate” archaeological sensitivity as mapped on County resource maps, or that are located within 750 feet on known resources. Criteria for waiving the report requirements are mostly limited to:

- 1) Development proposed on a parcel for which an archaeological investigation was previously prepared and such report clearly and adequately addressed the area and scope of the proposed development;
- 2) Development on previously disturbed lands; or
- 3) Development not involving land clearing or land disturbance

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

None.

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