

Power and Industrial

California Fast-Tracks Fresno Solar-Battery Project with Regulatory-Easing Measure

By Angela Shah



The Cornucopia Hybrid Project project design will accommodate dual-use agriculture by employing sheep grazing alongside the solar modules.

Photo courtesy BayWa r.e.

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A solar-battery project slated for Fresno County has been fast-tracked by California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D), becoming the first major clean energy project to move forward under the state's new regulatory-easing program.

The Cornucopia Hybrid Project is expected to deliver 300 MW of renewable solar energy and 300 MW of battery storage. BayWa r.e. Americas, a U.S. subsidiary of a German-based renewable energy company, is building the project. Construction is expected to begin at the end of 2027 and complete by mid-2030, the company said.

Earlier this month, Newsom certified the project through a scaled-back regulations policy, known as the “Build More Faster” plan. The move, put in place as part of the 2023 infrastructure package passed by the state legislature, streamlines the process for legal challenges against eligible clean energy and green housing projects through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

With the certification, courts must decide CEQA challenges within 270 days, saving months or even years of litigation delays after a project has already passed environmental review, while still allowing legal challenges to be heard.

“By fast-tracking critical projects, we’re creating good-paying jobs, cutting pollution and building a cleaner, more reliable energy grid to serve Californians for generations,” Gov. Newsom said in a statement.

Cornucopia’s solar energy generation facility is planned to consist of photovoltaic solar modules, a substation and switching station, an energy storage system, and two prefabricated structures to be used for maintenance and operation services and for control services.

The solar modules would be connected to power inverters to convert sunlight into usable alternating current power. The energy would then be transferred from the inverters to a substation before the power is sent to the local electrical grid. The substation is expected to include an electrical control building and would tie into the switching station via a new transmission line.

The energy storage system at Cornucopia will be made up of battery storage comprising lithium-ion, flow or sodium sulfur batteries. That system would be located adjacent to a new Pacific Gas and Electric switching station, with a footprint of about 12 acres in size. Since the site will still be subject to certain agricultural land-use rules, the company said sheep will graze on lands within and surrounding the proposed solar photovoltaic panels and equipment.

The combination of solar energy and battery storage will enable the facility to provide carbon-free electricity to the grid during peak demand times, including evening and nighttime hours when renewable generation is limited. When completed, the project will be able to power up to 300,000 homes, officials say.

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