3.4.20 Wildfire

If located in or near state responsibility areas or lands classified as very high fire hazard severity zones, would the project:

		Potentially Significant Impact	Less Than Significant With Mitigation Incorporated	Less Than Significant Impact	No Impact
a)	Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan?	☐	☐	☐	☒
b)	Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire?	☐	☐	☐	☒
c)	Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment?	☐	☐	☒	☐
d)	Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes?	☐	☐	☒	☐

Wildfire risk in California is evaluated on a three-tier scale based on fire hazard severity potential: very high, high, and moderate. The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CALFIRE) maps all areas in the state that could fall under any tier of this scale and divides these areas into zones. This Plan is concerned with the location of Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zones (VHFHSZs). The City of Seal Beach has no land that is currently classified as VHFHSZs. Seal Beach does not have a history of wildfires. As the City has become increasingly developed over time, the amount of land where wildfires could emerge has shrunk. Given how little undeveloped land remains in Seal Beach that the City directly controls, it is unlikely that the City will be affected by a wildfire of any significance (City of Seal Beach, 2019).

a. Substantially impair an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan? (No Impact)

The project is required to meet all applicable fire codes and City regulations that provide for adequate access to and from the site and would not impair access. The project would not impair the implementation or physically interfere with an adopted emergency response plan or emergency evacuation plan. Therefore, there would be no impact.

b. Due to slope, prevailing winds, and other factors, exacerbate wildfire risks, and thereby expose project occupants to pollutant concentrations from a wildfire or the uncontrolled spread of a wildfire? (No Impact)

The PV solar facility would be located with the existing Hellman Ranch OGPF in an area that would not be expected to increase the risk of wildfire in the area. Construction of the proposed Project would not change the slope site or otherwise affect wind patterns in the area that would exacerbate wildfire risks. The site would not require grading or recontouring. The solar panels would be low to the ground (mounted approximately 18-inches to 4 feet above the ground surface) and would not affect wind directions or wind patterns. Therefore, no impact would occur.

c. Require the installation or maintenance of associated infrastructure (such as roads, fuel breaks, emergency water sources, power lines or other utilities) that may exacerbate fire risk or that may result in temporary or ongoing impacts to the environment? (Less than Significant)

No new roads, fuel breaks, or emergency water sources would be installed as part of the proposed Project.

Brush and vegetation within the Project site would be mowed or weed wacked at the start of construction which would minimize the risk of igniting a wildlife. After construction, low vegetation would be allowed to grow under the solar panels. The potential for solar panel failure that would result in fires is very low because solar panels do not generate sparks or contain parts that are known to start fires. During operation vegetation management would occur that would involve mowing the vegetation within the project area.

The power lines installed with the solar panels would all be placed underground, where the risk for igniting fires would be very low. The transformers and inverters would be contained with electrical boxes. The risk of ignition from these electrical components would be low because the electrical box would contain any potential sparks in the event of an equipment malfunction.

The PV solar facility would also have access to the existing Hellman OGPF firewater system. The water monitors at the oil storage facility would be able to provide firewater to the PV solar facility in the unlikely event of a fire. Therefore, the impact would be less than significant.

d. Expose people or structures to significant risks, including downslope or downstream flooding or landslides, as a result of runoff, post-fire slope instability, or drainage changes? (Less than Significant)

The PV solar facility is surrounded by urbanized uses and borders the Heron Pointe water quality basin. As described in Section 3.4.7, Geology and Soils, the Project site is relatively flat and has not historically been affected by landslides, nor has the area directly surrounding the Project. Construction of the Project would not involve substantial grading that could result in landslides because of post-fire instability. As described in Section 3.4.10, Hydrology and Water Quality, the drainage patterns of the Project site would not be altered during construction. In the unlikely event of a fire at the PV solar facility it could spread to other areas if it was contained. The PV solar facility would be subject to the existing Hellman OGPF Fire Protection Plan, which covers the entire facility site. The Hellman OGPF also has an extensive firewater system that is adequate to address any fire at the PV solar facility. As such, the PV solar facility would not pose a significant risk to people or structures due to runoff, post-fire slope instability or drainage changes due to the flat topography of the site. Therefore, the impacts would be less than significant.