

**Imperial County
Planning & Development Services Department
NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF DRAFT PROGRAM EIR FOR THE
LITHIUM VALLEY SPECIFIC PLAN
NOTICE OF PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING**

The Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department intends to prepare a Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) for the proposed Lithium Valley Specific Plan Project (Project), as described below. A public scoping meeting for the proposed PEIR will be held by the Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department at **6:00 PM on December 14, 2023**. The scoping meeting will be held at the Board of Supervisors Chambers, 2nd Floor, County Administration Center located at 940 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243. Comments regarding the scope of the PEIR will be accepted at this meeting. Additionally, comments may be sent to the Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, California 92243, attention Jim Minnick, Director.

SUBJECT: Lithium Valley Specific Plan

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS CONSIDERATION: Winter 2023/2024.

PROJECT LOCATION: The Lithium Valley Specific Plan (Project) is located in Imperial County, California, specifically covering an approximate area of 51,786 acres adjacent to the southeastern shore of the Salton Sea (see Figure 1). This area is in unincorporated Imperial County land, situated within the basin of the Salton Sea, with the Alamo River channel running through the center of the Study Area, draining into the Salton Sea. The Study Area extends from the Imperial Wildlife Area Wister Unit in the north to the City of Calipatria in the south, bounded by the New River on the southwest. It covers shoreline and open water portions of the Salton Sea and extends slightly into the alluvial fans at the base of the Chocolate Mountains. The topography is generally flat but sloping from east to west towards the Salton Sea, and below sea level. The land use in the Study Area primarily consists of agriculture, the Salton Sea, existing geothermal energy facilities, with some limited residential, and recreational uses. The proximity to the Salton Sea, National Wildlife Refuges, and abundant open space promotes recreational and commercial farming activities.

The Project is located in the Section, Range, and Townships within the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) quadrangles of Frink, Iris Wash, Niland, Obsidian Butte, Westmorland East, Westmoreland West and Wister Quadrangles.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: On June 30, 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Senate Bill (SB) 125 authorizing the state to assist in developing Imperial County's lithium resource in an area that is a part of the Salton Sea Known Geothermal Resource Area, known as Lithium Valley. Among other provisions, SB 125 appropriated funding to develop a Lithium Valley Specific Plan and PEIR and to distribute grants to local community-based organizations to conduct engagement related to the Specific Plan and PEIR. The Lithium Valley Specific Plan and PEIR is intended to provide a framework and guidance for the necessary infrastructure and facilities and streamline the development and permitting of additional renewable energy facilities, mineral recovery, lithium battery manufacturing, and other renewable industries within an approximately 51,786-acre area adjacent to the Salton Sea. The Specific Plan aims to facilitate the existing and future renewable energy development, lithium extraction, associated infrastructure, commercial, and related manufacturing industries investment that provides quality local jobs, while minimizing adverse effects on the environment and public health. This Project would be a pivotal step for Imperial Valley towards a more sustainable and localized economy and support the nations' ability to produce sustainable technologies.

To-date, the Land Use Alternatives have been developed with public and stakeholder input. The proposed Project Land Use Plan included herein as Figure 2, consists of a revised version of the Alternative 2

presented to the November 7, 2023 BOS, reflecting comments received at that meeting. Figure 3 provides a summary of the proposed land use designations.

GENERAL PLAN DESIGNATIONS AND ZONING: The Project area is designated as “Recreation and Open Space” as well as “Agriculture” by the Imperial County General Plan.

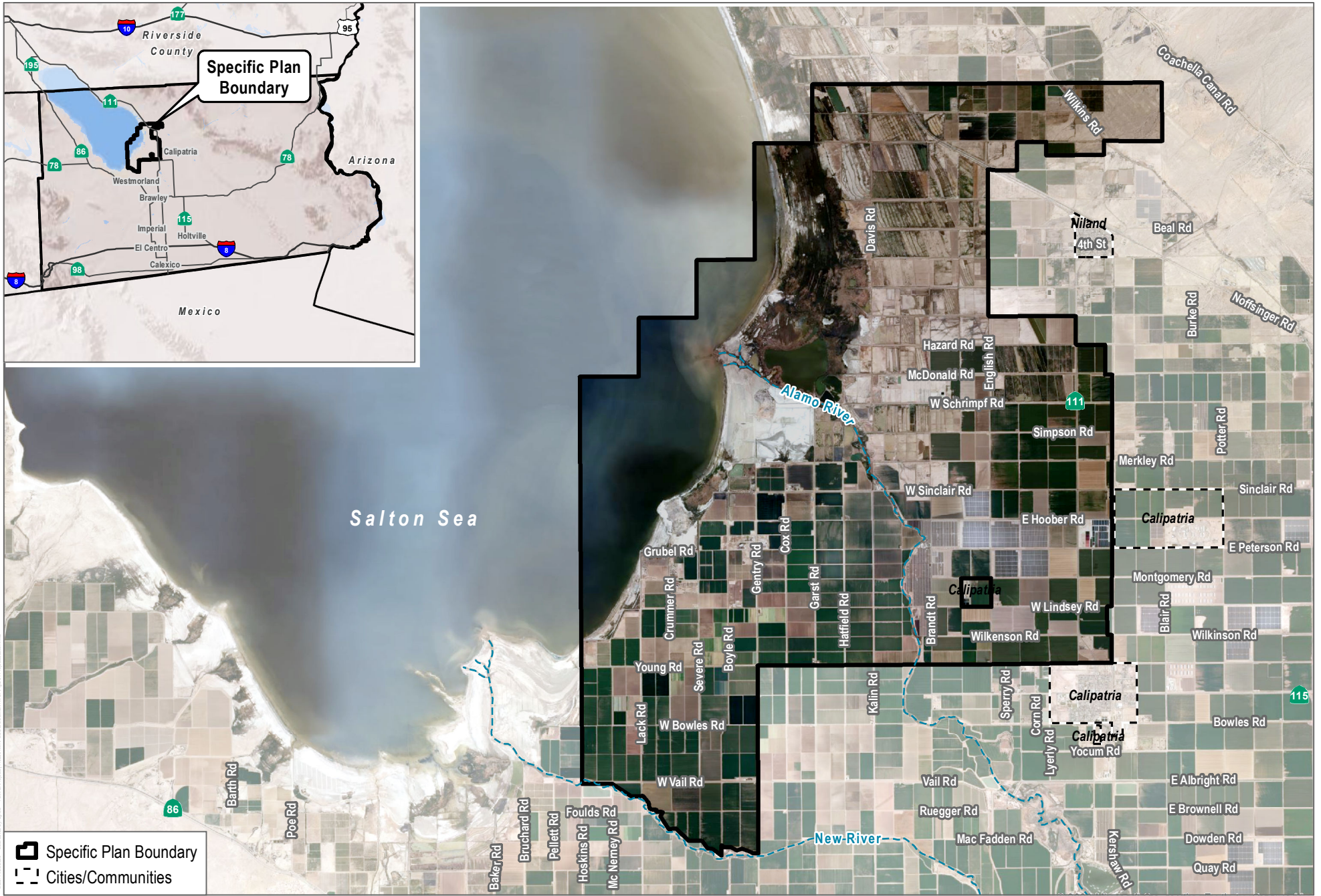
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS DISTRICT: District 4, Supervisor, Ryan E. Kelly.

ANTICIPATED SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS: The PEIR will analyze potential impacts associated with all CEQA topics as follows: Aesthetics, Agriculture/Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Energy, Geology/Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards/Hazardous Materials, Hydrology/Water Quality, Land Use and Planning, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Public Services, Recreation, Transportation, Tribal Cultural Resources, Utilities and Service Systems, Wildfire and Mandatory Findings of Significance.

COMMENTS REQUESTED: The Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department would like to know your ideas about the effects this project might have on the environment and your suggestions as to alternatives, mitigation or ways the project may be revised to reduce or avoid any significant environmental impacts. Your comments will guide the scope and content of environmental issues to be examined in the EIR. Your comments may be submitted in writing to: Jim Minnick, Director, Imperial County Planning & Development Services Department, 801 Main Street, El Centro, CA 92243. Available project information may be reviewed at this location. Due to the limits mandated by State law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date but no later than 35 days after receipt of this notice.

AVAILABILITY: Copies of this NOP and the associated Initial Study are available at the County of Imperial Planning and Development Services offices at 801 Main Street El Centro, CA 92243, and online at: <https://lithiumvalley.imperialcounty.org/>

NOTICE OF PREPARATION REVIEW PERIOD: December 7, 2023 – extended to February 20, 2024

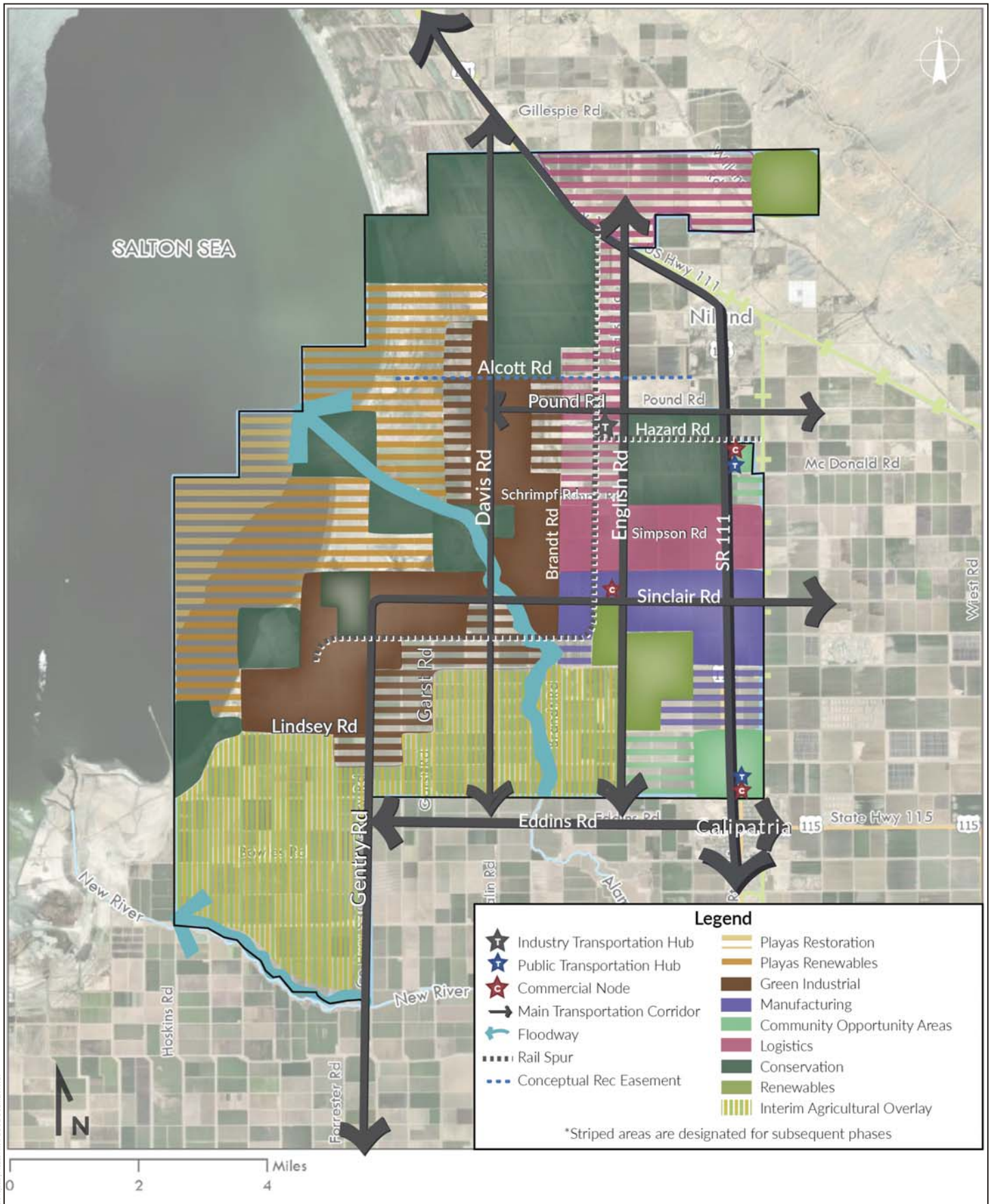


Specific Plan Boundary
 Cities/Communities

SOURCE: Imperial County; Open Street Map; Bing Maps



FIGURE 1
Planning Area
 Salton Sea Lithium Specific Plan



SOURCE: Imperial County

FIGURE 2

Proposed Project Land Use Plan

Salton Sea Lithium Specific Plan

COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY AREAS: This land use designation intends to promote the development of critical public facilities and services to support public health near the communities of Niland and Calipatria. These areas act as large-scale buffers between residents and industrial-type land uses. The Community Opportunity Areas may be further refined and planned in collaboration with the neighboring communities of Niland and Calipatria through the Specific Plan process to ensure these areas properly meet the community's needs. Allowed uses may include, but are not limited to, markets, civic uses, parks, commercial recreational uses, health care facilities, childcare facilities, public services, workforce education and training centers, office, hotels, entertainment, gasoline and EV charging stations, and public transportation hubs.

GREEN INDUSTRIAL: These areas have a focus on geothermal energy production plants, however, would allow for additional industrial uses that support the goal of decarbonizing the energy industry. This designation may allow for industrial plants, and storage, distribution, and administrative facilities, including uses conducted outside of an enclosed building. The Specific Plan may restrict the use of certain products, processes, or manufacturing equipment due to external effects. Allowed uses may include, but not limited to, geothermal energy production and mineral recovery, biofuel generation, and green hydrogen. Ancillary uses may include, but not limited to, supportive manufacturing, commercial, logistics, and battery manufacturing and storage.

MANUFACTURING: This designation provides suitable industrial, office, and warehouse space for manufacturers of goods. Manufacturing may include compounding, processing, assembling, packaging, treatment or fabrication of materials and products such as electric vehicle batteries. Allowed uses may include, but not limited to, manufacturing, research and development, workforce training, industrial parks, and temporary construction housing. Ancillary uses may include, but not limited to, geothermal and mineral recovery, logistics, office, commercial, and battery storage.

LOGISTICS: The areas identified for Logistics provide suitable space for the warehousing and distribution that allows for a variety of suppliers and services. Logistics activities may include, but not limited to, logistic facilities, industrial transportation hubs, outdoor storage of trucks, trailers, and shipping containers, and temporary construction housing. Ancillary uses may include, but not limited to, geothermal and mineral recovery, manufacturing facilities, office, employee services and property management facilities.

PLAYAS RENEWABLES: This designation recognizes the unique relationship to the Salton Sea and the possibly restrictive geologic conditions, including the clays and seismic activity. As such, geologic testing will be needed with any proposed structures within the Playas Renewables designation to determine the viability of development on the proposed site. This designation will require a certain percentage of the site be dedicated for dust suppression via natural vegetation and restoration techniques, beyond what is required to mitigate onsite surface impacts. Allowed uses may include, but not limited to, geothermal energy operations and mineral recovery, subsurface geothermal wells, pipes and mineral rights, habitat restoration, and dust suppression and public health mitigation projects. Ancillary uses may include, but not limited to, solar photovoltaics structures or floating structures (floatovoltaics).

PLAYAS RESTORATION: Due to the sensitive resources, valuable habitat, and public health needs to limit dust, this designation mainly allows for subsurface geothermal activities and above-surface environmental restoration activities. Other allowed uses include subsurface mineral rights, air quality monitor structures, and photovoltaics. Exception within this designation may be allowed with Director of Planning approval.

RENEWABLES: This designation is located over two existing and planned solar farm developments. As this use is aligned with the overall intent of the Lithium Valley Specific Plan vision, the use of solar is intended to remain until the end of its project lifespan. Once the project life span has past the subsequent land use shall revert to the land use designation surrounding the majority of the site.

CONSERVATION: The conservation land use intends to provide area for conserved and/or restored critical habitat, Salton Sea rehabilitation projects, and mitigation lands. This designation currently contains areas under existing contract by the Imperial Irrigation District (IID) for restoration and mitigation efforts. Allowed uses may include, but are not limited to, subsurface geothermal wells, subsurface mineral rights, and passive use trails that provide connections to the Salton Sea. Additional uses could be allowed by the Director of Planning pending ecological or cultural performance studies.

FLOODWAY: This designation identifies a floodplain area associated with the New River and Alamo River which flow south to north into the Salton Sea. The Floodway designation covers an approximately 950-foot buffer (475 feet on each side) on the Alamo River and a 785-foot buffer (392.5 feet on each side) on the New River. This designation will serve as permanent open space within the Specific Plan area. Allowed uses may include riparian restoration, native riparian habitat, and passive recreation such as picnic areas and trails.

INTERIM AGRICULTURAL OVERLAY: The overlay designation intends to be retained as agriculture until there is sufficient need to transition to industry-driven uses outside their initial land use designated areas. Interim uses include solar, agrivoltaics, and agricultural lands that are actively involved with agricultural crop production and animal keeping, including aquaculture, dairies, feed lots, and animal sales yards as a primary use. Subsequent phases allowed used include green industrial, manufacturing, and commercial along Forrester Road. Subsequent phases allowed uses will be considered once infrastructure has been expanded to support such uses.

