

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Lower Colorado Region
Phoenix Area Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

AZ SOLAR 1 INTERCONNECTION PROJECT
LA PAZ COUNTY, ARIZONA
DOE/EA-2098

Approved: 
Acting For

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Phoenix Area Office
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FONSI No.: 19-04

Introduction

The Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), with the Bureau of Reclamation as a cooperating agency, prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed construction of a photovoltaic (PV) solar plant near Salome, Arizona, and interconnection to the electrical transmission system. The nearest transmission line to the proposed solar facility is the Little Harquahala to Harcuvar 115-kilovolt Transmission Line. The transmission line is part of the Central Arizona Project built by Reclamation and operated by WAPA. The transmission line runs approximately north–south on lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), adjacent to the proposed solar facility, in an existing right-of-way (ROW) held by Reclamation.

AZ Solar 1 proposes to build, operate, maintain, and decommission an approximately 32.5-megawatt (MW) PV solar energy generation facility on an approximately 480-acre private parcel of land. An optional, approximately 27.5 MW of PV solar energy generation and 20 MW of battery storage may be added to the parcel based on market considerations. Construction of the facility includes installing solar panels, underground collection lines, access roads, on-site collection point substation/switchyard, and a short aerial connection (less than 100-foot-long) across BLM land from the new transmission line pole structures and into AZ Solar 1's switchyard. Because approximately 75 feet of the aerial connection is located outside of the existing transmission line easement, AZ Solar 1 would apply for a new ROW from BLM to install and maintain the aerial connection outside of the existing ROW. As part of the proposed action, Reclamation would approve WAPA's proposed changes to the transmission line and provide concurrence to BLM for AZ Solar 1's ROW application.

Public Involvement

WAPA initiated a 30-day public scoping period for the project on October 24, 2018, which ended on November 26, 2018. Scoping letters were mailed to 59 agencies, organizations, and interested parties, 10 tribes, and approximately 1,200 landowners in the Salome area to inform them of the project and scoping period, and to request input on the federal actions. WAPA published two newspaper advertisements in the *Parker Pioneer* (on October 24, 2018 and November 7, 2018) publicizing the scoping notice and open house. Forty people attended the public scoping meeting held on November 8, 2018, in Salome, Arizona. In addition, at the request of the Colorado River Indian Tribes, the agencies held a scoping meeting with representatives of the Colorado River Indian Tribes on November 21, 2018, in Parker, Arizona. WAPA, Reclamation, and AZ Solar 1 also met with representatives from the Colorado River Indian Tribes (in person and teleconference) on May 1, 2019, and a site visit was also conducted with representatives from the Colorado River Indian Tribes on May 16, 2019. WAPA received 16 submittals from 11 individuals, 2 businesses, 2 state government agencies, and 1 tribe. Input received during scoping concerned a range of environmental and impacts analysis issues.

The Draft EA was published on March 9, 2019, and public comments were accepted from March 29, 2019 to April 29, 2019. WAPA mailed notices of the Draft EA publication to the

project mailing list, posted flyers announcing the Draft EA at the Salome Post Office and McMullen Valley Chamber of Commerce, and published two newspaper advertisements in the *Parker Pioneer* during the 30-day public comment period. WAPA received two comment letters on the Draft EA, one from the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and one from the Colorado River Indian Tribes. The primary topics raised in the comments included wildlife fencing, historic resources, tribal resources, and mitigation. The Draft EA was revised in response to the comments received.

Major Considerations

The following issues were addressed in the EA and have been taken into consideration in Reclamation's determination of whether a FONSI is appropriate, or an environmental impact statement should be prepared.

1. The proposed action would impact resources as described in the EA. Generally, impacts to soil, air, biological resources, groundwater, land use, noise, transportation resources and visual resources would be negligible/minor and short-term, and best management practices and additional applicant proposed measures would be implemented as part of the proposed actions to reduce impacts, as described in Section 2.6.5 of the EA. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA are considered significant.
2. The proposed action would have a negligible impact on public health and safety from fugitive dust emissions and hazardous materials use and storage, during construction, operations and maintenance, and decommissioning. The short-term fugitive dust emissions from construction and long-term emissions over the operations phase would not substantially increase emissions over background levels or cause an exceedance of National Ambient Air Quality Standards. With the implementation of conservation measures for handling of hazardous materials, impacts to public health and safety from hazardous materials, are unlikely.
3. The proposed action is not expected to have an adverse effect on the quality of the human environment. No disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and/or low-income populations would result. The proposed action would have a short-term beneficial impact on employment in the analysis area during construction and decommissioning, and a negligible long-term beneficial impact during operations.
4. The proposed action would not have direct adverse impacts to unique characteristics of the geographic area such as park lands, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. Land development would be subject to compliance with local, state, and Federal laws and ordinances protecting environmental resources.
5. The proposed action would not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

6. The proposed action does not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.
7. Significant adverse cumulative effects resulting from the proposed action are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the project's effects is contained in Chapter 3 of the EA.
8. The proposed action would not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural resources inventory has been completed for the project area. No historic properties would be disturbed by the proposed action; therefore, no impacts to historic properties are anticipated from the construction, operations and maintenance, or decommissioning of the proposed action.
9. The proposed action would not have an adverse effect on federally-listed threatened or endangered wildlife species, or critical habitat. Impacts to special status species (e.g. Sonoran Desert tortoise) during construction include direct loss of potentially suitable habitat (465 acres), potential disturbance from human noise and activity, and risk for direct mortality from ground disturbance, and vehicle strikes. The proposed action is compliant with the 2015 "Candidate Conservation Agreement for the Sonoran Desert Tortoise" which exists between the USFWS and several other entities, including BLM and Reclamation and it is unlikely that the proposed action would result in direct mortality of individual species during construction. Special status species that may use the project area for foraging and breeding would experience long-term impacts as a result of disturbance and the loss of habitat. Long-term impacts to special status species would be negligible to minor and unlikely to result in population-level effects.
10. The proposed action does not violate any known Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment. Section 2.1.1.2 of the EA describes permits, easements, and licenses to be obtained in advance of construction in areas subject to the regulatory or permitting authority of a public or private entity.
11. The proposed action would not adversely affect Indian trust assets, or limit access to, or ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the attached Final EA, Reclamation has determined the proposed action would not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment, and an environmental impact statement is not warranted.