



— BUREAU OF —
RECLAMATION

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
(FONSI)
LC-22-25**

Arida – Mohave Transmission Line Project

Based on a thorough review of the analysis presented in the environmental effects section of the Final Environmental Assessment (EA), the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) finds that implementation of the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment within or adjacent to the project area, therefore an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) will not be prepared.

This FONSI has, therefore, been prepared and is submitted to document environmental review and evaluation of the Proposed Action in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended.

Prepared: _____ Date: _____
NEPA Coordinator

Recommended: _____ Date: _____
NEPA Coordinator

Approved: _____ Date: _____
Acting Chief, Resources Management Office

Background

A subsidiary of 8minute Solar Energy, 326FW 8me LLC, has applied for a right-of-way (ROW) with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and a License with Reclamation for an approximately 8.8-mile 500kV transmission line between the proposed Arida Solar Project and Substation and the existing Mohave Substation near Laughlin, Nevada referred to as the Arida – Mohave Transmission Line (Project). Of the approximately 7.2 miles of the Project that would cross federal land, approximately 6.7 miles would cross lands managed by the BLM and approximately 0.5 miles would cross lands managed by Reclamation.

In response to 8minute Solar Energy applications, the Federal agencies determined that an EA would be prepared in compliance with NEPA to assist with the identification of any potentially significant impacts that could result from the implementation of the Project. The BLM is the lead Federal agency for preparation of the EA and for compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The BLM prepared the *Environmental Assessment Arida – Mohave Transmission Line* (DOI-BLM-NV-S010-2022-0019-EA). Reclamation is a cooperating agency and hereby adopts the EA. The EA is incorporated by reference into this FONSI.

Reclamation's approval of the Project on Reclamation land will be granted by signing this FONSI and by the execution of a Use Authorization in the form of a License. The BLM has issued a separate FONSI and will execute a ROW permit for the Project on lands they manage.

The EA analyzed the No Action Alternative, two action alternatives, and the Proposed Action. Under the No Action Alternative, the Project would not be constructed, and lands in the area would remain open for other uses. The two action alternatives would have replaced the segment of the proposed route on federal and private lands in the vicinity of a flood-control structure near Laughlin, NV and would have provided alternate approaches through Laughlin to the Mohave Substation.

The Proposed Action

The Proposed Action will provide for a BLM ROW and a Reclamation License to 326FW 8me LLC for construction of an approximately 8.8 mile 500 kV transmission line between the Arida Substation and the existing Mohave Substation. The proposed route will follow existing transmission line ROWs to the extent possible and utilize existing access roads to minimize impacts.

The ROW for the proposed route for the Project on federal lands will be approximately 7.2 miles long or 38,016 feet and up to 200 feet wide. Access along the entire length of the route will be provided via existing roads from which short spur roads will be built where needed to access each structure location. At a ROW width of 200 feet, the proposed Project will total approximately 175 acres for the permanent transmission ROW on federal land (163 acres on BLM and 12 acres on Reclamation).

All permanent Project disturbance including spur roads will be located within the proposed 200-foot ROW. Temporary disturbance will occur within the ROW at the work areas at each

structure location and at some locations outside the ROW to accommodate pulling and tensioning sites and equipment laydown areas. Detailed information on the Proposed Action can be found in the EA.

The Proposed Action will deliver renewable energy from the proposed Arida Solar Project located on lands owned and managed by Clark County to the regional electric grid via its interconnection to the Mohave Substation. The Project will help Nevada and surrounding states meet their renewable energy goals and be consistent with BLM goals to facilitate the development of renewable energy.

Environmental Commitments

8minute Solar Energy is required to comply with the measures listed in Appendices A and B of the EA. Appendix A contains Standard Stipulations and Mitigation Measures and Appendix B contains Applicant-Proposed Mitigation and Best Management Practices. 8minute Solar Energy is also required to comply with all measures required under the Project append to the Southern Nevada District's Programmatic Biological Opinion (PBO); Clark County, Nevada (File No. 08ENVS00-2019-F-0153/2022-0027339-S7-001), dated June 9, 2022.

8minute Solar Energy shall provide Reclamation with final versions of all plans required in the EA.

Environmental Impacts and Findings

The potential for impacts to a wide range of resources was considered in the EA. It was determined that there will be no adverse impacts affecting the following and these were not carried forward for additional analysis: Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, National Monument or Conservation Lands, Environmental Justice and Socioeconomics, Geology/Mineral Resources, Green House Gas/Climate Change, Hydrologic Conditions, Livestock Grazing, Paleontological Resources, Hazardous or Solid Wastes, Water Resources, Wetlands and Riparian Areas, Wild Horse and Burros, and Wilderness.

There will be no impacts, including cumulative impacts, to Indian Trust Assets as no Indian Trust Assets have been identified in the Project area. The Proposed Action will not adversely or disproportionately impact minority populations or low-income communities, as described in Executive Order 12898.

Twelve key issues and their corresponding resource areas were identified for analysis in the EA. These resource areas identified for analysis were Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Wildlife Resources, Vegetation, Floodplains, Recreation, Lands/Realty, Visual Resources, Soils, Fire Management, Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Animal Species, and Migratory Birds. These resource areas are discussed below.

Implementation of the Proposed Action will not result in significant impacts to any of the resources evaluated in the EA. It is Reclamation's determination that the implementation of the Proposed Action will not significantly impact the human environment, and an EIS will not be required.

Resources Evaluated in the EA

Air Quality

The proposed action will result in temporary impacts to air quality in the form of increased equipment emissions and fugitive dust during construction activities. A Dust Mitigation Plan and a Clark County dust control permit must be obtained prior to construction activities.

Cultural Resources

The BLM is the lead Federal agency for compliance with the NHPA. The proposed Project will not impact eligible historic properties. Implementation could possibly result in the disturbance and/or loss of currently unidentified resources but such losses will be mitigated by implementation of an Unanticipated Discoveries Plan. Consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office has been completed with a finding of no adverse effect on cultural resources.

Wildlife Resources

Direct impacts to wildlife could occur during construction activities and may result in displacement, injury, or potential mortality. Approximately 58.4 acres of wildlife habitat will be temporarily impacted, and fewer than 11 of those acres will be permanently impacted by construction activities. Indirect impacts could include the introduction and spread of weeds and increased erosion potential. Wildlife species in the general area are common and widely distributed throughout the area and the loss of some individuals and/or their habitat should have negligible impact on populations of the species throughout the region.

Vegetation

Native vegetation will be temporarily and permanently impacted by the construction of spur roads, the locations of structures, and through the use of pull sites. Short term impacts to native vegetation will occur. There is potential for increasing non-native species introductions, and the Project could promote the expansion of existing populations of noxious weeds within the transmission line corridor. Mitigation measures will be implemented and will reduce these impacts to vegetation.

Floodplains

Several transmission line structures will be located within the 100-year and 500-year floodplain under all potential routes analyzed. Given their small footprint and dispersed spacing, transmission line structures will not impede or affect flood flows. Additionally, the foundations of structures located within the floodplain will be designed to accommodate potential flood flows. The Proposed Action will therefore not result in adverse effects to the floodplain and will be in compliance with Executive Order 11988.

Recreation

Recreationists, especially off-highway vehicle (OHV) users, could be temporarily impacted during the 9 to 12-month construction period. Access to some areas on federal land for OHV could be limited during some periods of construction, as construction vehicles and personnel will use existing roads near the ROW for access. Accommodations will be made for OHV events scheduled during the construction period to eliminate potential conflict. No long-term impacts are expected to recreation use and access.

Lands/Realty

The Project will cross and parallel multiple permitted facilities, including an existing transmission line ROW and a flood control structure. A License from Reclamation and a ROW permit from the BLM is required for the proposed Project, and coordination with other permit-holders will occur to ensure the proposed Project will not interfere with continued operation of the existing facilities.

Visual Resources

Portions of the project area located on federal lands will be visible to passing vehicles from the Needles Highway. There will be an increase in visual contrasts noticeable in the immediate viewshed, as the addition of the new transmission structures may result in increased contrast to the landscape. The Project, however, will be located near two existing transmission lines and the grouping of the similar transmission facilities will minimize the overall visual effect on a regional basis.

Soils

Existing roads and pre-disturbed areas will be used wherever practicable for access during construction and long-term operations. Grading of the soil will occur to create spur roads and for clear zones around the foundations of the structures and will result in approximately 37 acres of temporary disturbance and fewer than 10 acres of permanent new disturbance on federal lands. Short-term impacts to soils will occur during construction as wind and water erosion potential will be temporarily increased. The natural terrain and existing drainage systems will be utilized to facilitate natural drainage and minimize impacts to existing topography.

Fire Management

Risk of fire will temporarily increase during construction activities from the construction equipment and vehicles used within the project area. Long-term fire risk will be low given the vertical separation of the transmission lines and the relatively low Mojave desert vegetation. An increase in the distribution and density of weeds could increase the long-term fire risk. A Fire Management Plan will be required.

Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Animal Species

The project area contains the federally threatened Mojave Desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). The BLM is the lead Federal agency for compliance with Section 7 of the ESA. Reclamation lands are included in the ESA Section 7 coverage under the BLM Southern Nevada District's PBO, giving BLM the discretion to enforce the measures of the PBO on Reclamation land. The BLM determined that the Proposed Action "may affect, likely to adversely affect" Mojave Desert tortoise and that there will be "no effect" to its designated critical habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appended this action to the PBO that determined the project is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Mojave Desert tortoise and no critical habitat will be affected. Through a combination of the mitigation measures, stipulations, avoidance, and minimization measures set forth in the terms and conditions of the PBO, impacts to the Mojave Desert tortoise shall be avoided or minimized.

Migratory Birds

The Proposed Action could result in the injury, killing, or displacement of migratory bird species during construction activities and through the permanent loss of habitat. Noxious weed introductions could also indirectly impact species by displacing native vegetation and the associated habitat it creates. Migratory bird species will be present in the area at different times of the year and impacts will be avoided or minimized through the implementation of mitigation measures.