

United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation
Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin
Phoenix Area Office

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

CO Bar Solar Interconnection Project
Coconino County, Arizona

Approved: _____ Date: _____

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FONSI No.: PXAO 23-02

Introduction and Background

The United States (U.S.) Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation, Interior Region 8: Lower Colorado Basin (Reclamation), has issued a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes the environmental impacts of, and potential alternatives to, CO Bar Solar, LLC's proposed interconnection of the CO Bar Solar Complex to the Navajo Southern Transmission Systems (NSTS) at the Moenkopi to Cedar Mountain 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, referred to as the CO Bar Solar Interconnection Project (the Proposed Action or Interconnection Project), in Coconino County, Arizona. The Proposed Action would provide up to 1,000 megawatts of generation output from the CO Bar Solar Complex to the NSTS transmission line, which is operated by Arizona Public Service (APS).

The Interconnection Project is located on a mixture of private land and land administered by the Arizona State Land Department. The interconnection facilities would include collection lines, a substation, up to two short intertie lines, and improvements to an APS switchyard that is currently under construction for another renewable energy project. The Interconnection Project also includes the improvement of roads managed by the Coconino National Forest (COF); therefore, the U.S. Forest Service (Forest Service) participated as a cooperating agency in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA; Public Law 91-190) process.

As owner of a share of the NSTS, Reclamation's purpose is to consider and, if appropriate, approve CO Bar Solar, LLC's application to interconnect the CO Bar Solar Complex to the NSTS at the Moenkopi to Cedar Mountain 500-kV transmission line.

The need for Reclamation's review and approval of the Large Generation Interconnection Agreement (LGIA) request is based on the partial ownership of the NSTS by the U.S. Government. The Navajo Generating Station and its associated transmission lines were authorized by the 1968 Colorado River Basin Project Act (Public Law 90-537, 82 Statute 885), and Reclamation manages the federal government's interests. Reclamation, along with the other owners, must approve the proposed interconnection into the NSTS.

Additional information is provided in the Final EA, which is incorporated by reference.

Public Involvement/Public Comment

In accordance with NEPA's purpose and Reclamation's regulations and policy, Reclamation solicited input from the public on the Proposed Action to assist in identifying key issues and defining the scope of the EA. A public notice soliciting comments was sent to 96 individuals, stakeholders, tribes, agencies, and organizations. The notice was also published on the Reclamation and Forest Service websites and in the *Arizona Daily Sun*, initiating a 30-day scoping period on March 10, 2023. The scoping period closed on April 10, 2023. In total, four comment letters were received during the scoping period. These comments are summarized in Table 1 of the Final EA.

The Draft EA was published for public review for a 30-day public comment period from August 8 to September 7, 2023. A Notice of Availability was sent to 96 individuals, stakeholders, tribes, agencies, and organizations, and a legal notice announcing the 30-day comment period was published in the *Arizona Daily Sun*. Information was also made available on the Reclamation and Forest Service websites. In total, four comment letters were received during the comment period for the Draft EA. Substantive comments and Reclamation's responses are summarized in Appendix A of the Final EA.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action (Selected Alternative), Reclamation would approve the LGIA for the Interconnection Project, which includes the construction, operation, maintenance, and eventual decommissioning of facilities for the interconnection of the CO Bar Solar Complex to the transmission grid at the Cedar Mountain to Moenkopi 500-kV transmission line. A detailed description of the Proposed Action is found in Chapter 2 of the Final EA.

Best management practices (BMPs) incorporated as part of the Proposed Action are listed in Table 5 of the Final EA. The environmental effects analysis conducted for the Final EA considers environmental effects after these BMPs are implemented. Implementation of BMPs would be required.

Summary of Impacts

Reclamation's analysis in the Final EA determined that there would be limited impacts resulting from the Proposed Action. The following issues were addressed in the Final EA and have been taken into consideration in Reclamation's determination of whether a Finding of No Significant Impact is appropriate, or an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be prepared.

- 1) Vegetation – The Proposed Action would result in temporary removal of 91.2 acres of pinyon-juniper woodland and semi-desert shrub steppe vegetation during construction, and the permanent removal of 39.2 acres of pinyon-juniper woodland and semi-desert shrub steppe vegetation for the 37-year operations period. These vegetation communities are locally and regionally abundant. The Proposed Action would have minor, adverse, short-term effects to vegetation during construction and decommissioning. Adverse long-term effects to vegetation during operations would be negligible.
- 2) General Wildlife – The Proposed Action would temporarily remove 91.2 acres of habitat and disturb local wildlife during construction; 39.2 acres of habitat would be permanently removed during the 37-year operations period. Habitat impacts would be minimized by implementing a Noxious Weed Management Plan and a Revegetation Plan. Wildlife could be displaced by increased noise and human presence and could be injured or killed by vehicles and equipment operating in the project area. These impacts would be minimized

through pre-construction migratory bird nest clearance surveys and a 25-mph speed limit on project access roads. The risk of eagle and other migratory bird collision with, or electrocution by, the collector lines and intertie lines would be minimized by following Avian Power Line Interaction Committee guidance. The Proposed Action would have minor, adverse, short-term effects to general wildlife during construction and decommissioning. Adverse long-term effects to general wildlife during operations would be negligible.

- 3) Special-Status Species – The potential impacts to Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed and candidate species, eagles protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, and COF sensitive wildlife would be similar to those described above for general wildlife. The Proposed Action would not adversely affect species listed or proposed to be listed under the ESA and would have negligible to minor, adverse, short-term effects to other special-status species during construction and decommissioning. Adverse, long-term effects to special-status species during operations would be negligible.
- 4) Cultural Resources – The Proposed Action would not result in adverse effects to historic properties.
- 5) Noise – The Proposed Action would result in minor, adverse, short-term, elevations in noise levels during construction and decommissioning. Operational noise would not exceed 50 A-weighted decibels at the property boundary. Long-term noise impacts during operations would be negligible.
- 6) Transportation – The Proposed Action would result in temporary increases in traffic along U.S. Route 180 by approximately 3.9 percent to 7.8 percent during construction and decommissioning. The potential for delays to travelers on U.S. Route 180 and project access roads would be minimized through the implementation of a Traffic Control Plan. The Proposed Action would have minor, adverse, short-term effects to transportation during the construction and decommissioning periods. Long-term effects to transportation during operations would be negligible.
- 7) Aesthetics and Scenery Resources – Impacts to aesthetics and scenery resources would be minimal due to the existing transmission infrastructure in the project area and because views of the Interconnection Project from sensitive viewing locations (such as U.S. Route 180 and the Arizona National Scenic Trail) would be obscured by the distance from the Interconnection Project and the intervening topography and vegetation. The Proposed Action would have minor, adverse, short-term effects to aesthetics and scenery resources during construction and decommissioning. Adverse long-term effects during operations would be negligible to minor.

The following resource issues were evaluated and determined to be either not affected or minimally affected with implementation of BMPs and were therefore not analyzed in further detail in the EA: air quality, climate change, environmental justice, floodplains and flood zones, Indian Trust Assets,

non-native plants and noxious weeds, land use and livestock grazing, paleontology, public health and safety, recreation and access, socioeconomics, soils, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers jurisdictional waters (including wetlands), and water quantity and quality. The resources eliminated and the rationale for elimination are presented in Table 7 of the Final EA.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the analysis presented in the Final EA for the CO Bar Solar Interconnection Project, Reclamation has determined that the Proposed Action will not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not warranted.