

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

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

APS Queue 255 Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project

Approved: _____

Alexander Smith, Acting Area Manager
Phoenix Area Office
Bureau of Reclamation

Date: _____

FONSI No.: PXAO 22-02

Introduction

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) prepared a Final Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the potential environmental effects of the proposal by 302PN 8me LLC (8ME), a wholly owned subsidiary of 8 Minute Energy, and the Navajo Tribal Utility Authority (NTUA) to construct, operate, maintain, and eventually decommission the Arizona Public Service (APS) Queue 255 Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project (Project), which is located on the Navajo Nation near Page, Arizona. The Project will interconnect the proposed Red Antelope Solar Project, also located with the Navajo Nation, to the Navajo Generating Station (NGS) Switchyard. 8ME and NTUA are partnering on the solar project. 8ME has filed an interconnection request with APS at the NGS Switchyard for the solar project. The NTUA will construct and operate the Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project. The NGS Switchyard is part of the Navajo Southern Transmission System (NSTS), which is partially owned by the federal government. Reclamation is responsible for the federal interest in the NSTS and must approve the interconnect into the NGS Switchyard.

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

Purpose and Need

As owner of a share of the NSTS, Reclamation's purpose is to consider the application for interconnection of the Project to the NSTS at the NGS Switchyard. Reclamation's need for the action is to respond to 8ME's application for a Large Generator Interconnection Agreement (LGIA) in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and policies described below and, if appropriate, approve the LGIA.

Reclamation's need is based on the partial ownership of the Navajo Transmission System by the United States (U.S.) government. The NGS and the associated transmission lines were authorized by the Colorado River Basin Project Act, and Reclamation manages the Federal government's interests. Reclamation, along with the other owners, must approve the proposed interconnection into the NGS Switchyard.

Additionally, the Department of Interior (DOI) Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2018-2022 commits DOI agencies, including Reclamation, to expand the production of energy resources (DOI 2018). Executive Order (EO) 14057 supports American clean energy industries and jobs through Federal sustainability and accompanying Federal Sustainability Plan (collectively referred to as "The Federal Sustainability Plan"). Efforts by Reclamation to facilitate the development of non-federal Non-Hydro Renewable Energy (N-HRE) projects are also supported by a number of federal statutes, including the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (Public Law [PL] 109-58); the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (PL 110-140); and the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (PL 111-11).

Public Involvement

Reclamation solicited input from the public on the proposed project to assist in identifying key issues and defining the scope of the EA. Reclamation conducted scoping via mail (to 50 potentially interested agencies, organizations, tribes, and neighbors to the Proposed Action), newspaper notices (in both the Navajo Times and Lake Powell Chronicle), and internet publication. Appendix A of the EA contains a copy of the scoping letter. Scoping for this project began on March 11, 2022. Within the 15-day scoping period, Reclamation received one comment from the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office indicating that they did not have jurisdiction over the Project. No significant issues were brought up during scoping to be addressed in the EA.

On August 25, 2022, Reclamation made available the Draft EA for public review and comment. A Notice of Availability was posted on Reclamation's website (<https://www.usbr.gov/lc/phoenix/index.html>), published in local newspapers, and mailed to the potentially interested agencies, organizations, tribes, and neighbors. During the 15-day comment period, no comments were received.

Proposed Action

Under the Proposed Action (the Selected Alternative), Reclamation will approve the LGIA for the Project, which includes the construction, operation, maintenance, and eventual decommissioning of three approximately 12-mile long, 500 kilovolt gen-tie lines for interconnection to the regional transmission grid system at the NGS Switchyard. The gen-tie lines will deliver the energy produced at the Red Antelope Solar Project to the point of interconnection. A detailed description of the Proposed Action is found in the Final EA under Chapter 2.

Major Considerations

Reclamation's analysis in the Final EA determined that there will 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 if an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) should be prepared.

1. The Proposed Action will impact resources as described in the Final EA. In general, impacts to biological resources, cultural resources, environmental justice, Indian Trust Assets, land use, and socioeconomics would be negligible or minor and short-term. Conservation and mitigation measures identified in the EA for biological and cultural resources along with additional applicant proposed measures described in Appendix C of the Final EA will be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to reduce impacts. The conservation and mitigation measures identified in Chapter 3 and Appendix C of the Final EA along with the

permits to be acquired (Section 4.1 of the Final EA) will be implemented by NTUA or its contractors.

2. The Proposed Action will not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects, nor involve unique or unknown environmental risks.
3. The Proposed Action will have a negligible impact on public health and safety from (1) fugitive dust and vehicular/equipment emissions, (2) hazardous materials use and storage, and (3) electrical or fire hazards during the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of the gen-tie lines and interconnection. The short-term, minor increase in fugitive dust emissions and vehicular/equipment emissions from construction and decommissioning, and the long-term, negligible effect from vehicular/equipment emissions over the operational phase of the project will not substantially increase emissions over background levels or cause an exceedance of National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The Proposed Action will allow for the interconnection of renewable energy, which will have an overall net long-term, beneficial effect on climate change by offsetting fossil-fuel generation. With the implementation of conservation measures identified in Appendix C, impacts to public health and safety are reduced.
4. The Proposed Action will 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.
5. The construction for the Proposed Action will result in a long-term, minor, adverse impacts to land and soils from the conversion of 25.4 acres for transmission structure work areas and newly created roads and a short-term, minor, adverse impact from temporary disturbances of 27.6 acres for laydown areas and pull/stringing sites. The Project will have limited short-term, adverse effects on local land uses from construction and decommissioning. Project construction and decommissioning will be coordinated with Arizona Department of Transportation, existing right-of-way (ROW) holders, grazing permittees, and local residents. Land development will be subject to compliance with state, Federal, and tribal laws and ordinances.
6. No new permanent impacts to several small intermittent or ephemeral drainages crossed by the Project are anticipated to occur as they would be spanned by the Project (structures would be located outside of drainages) and existing roads would be used for access. If minor impacts to jurisdictional waters are to occur from road crossings, NTUA will comply with both the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (Clean Water Act) as well as the Navajo Nation's Clean Water Act.

Construction activities will produce a short-term increase in noise within the proposed ROW over the existing ambient noise levels but would be temporary and minor in nature. Long term noise effects from the operation and maintenance of the proposed Project would be negligible.

7. The Proposed Action is not expected to have an adverse effect on the quality of the human environment. Despite the project area qualifying as an environmental justice area subject to EO 12898, no disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority and/or low-income populations will result. The Proposed Action will 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.
8. 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.
9. Significant adverse cumulative effects resulting from the Proposed Action are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the Project's effects is found in Chapter 3 of the EA.
10. The Proposed Action will not adversely affect districts, sites, buildings, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), or cause loss or destruction of significant cultural or historical resources. A cultural resources inventory completed for the project area identified one archaeological site (AZ-K-11-10) eligible for listing in the NRHP and 36 ineligible isolated occurrences. Reclamation, in compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), consulted with the Navajo Nation and seven other tribes regarding the NRHP-eligibility of AZ-K-11-10 and Reclamation's determination of No Adverse Effect. Through planned monitoring and conservation measures identified in the Final EA, no cultural resources or historic properties are anticipated to be disturbed by the construction, operation, maintenance, or decommissioning of the gen-tie lines and interconnection. Reclamation has concluded its NHPA compliance with a concurrence from the Navajo Nation's and Hopi Tribes Tribal Historic Preservation Officers. Reclamation did not receive any further comments during the Section 106 consultation process.

The Proposed Action will not limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites by Indian religious practitioners, or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007 and 512 DM 3). No traditional cultural properties or sacred sites were identified within the Project area.

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11. The Proposed Action would not adversely affect Indian Trust Assets. The Project will change the land use for 53 acres of tribal trust lands. The ROW associated with the gen-tie and interconnection will be acquired by NTUA (a wholly owned and operated Navajo Nation entity) and will be issued by the Navajo Nation in accordance with 25 U.S.C. Section 415(e) and the Tribe's general leasing regulations. The Navajo Nation will economically benefit from the Proposed Action. No adverse impacts to tribal trust lands will occur with the change in use.

Hunting and gathering, grazing, and other traditional land uses on the tribal trust lands crossed by the Project will continue. These activities could be temporarily interrupted for a short duration during construction of the Project and then again during decommissioning. Through their coordination with local residents and grazing permittees before and during construction and decommissioning, NTUA will identify and coordinate with locals who could be using the area for traditional uses. During operations, hunting and gathering, grazing, and other traditional land uses will continue in the ROW and will only be negligibly affected. Overall, there will be no net loss to traditional land use rights from the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning.

12. The Proposed Action will have no effect on designated critical habitat or federally listed threatened or endangered species, including a nonessential experimental [10(j)] population of California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*). The Project has the potential for a minor, adverse impacts to three foraging, Navajo Department of Fish and Wildlife species of concern (Pronghorns [*Antilocapra americana*], golden eagles [*Aquila chrysaetos*], and ferruginous hawks [*Buteo regalis*]) from noise disturbance and loss of habitat. Conservation and mitigation measures identified in the EA along with additional applicant proposed measures described in Appendix C of the EA will be implemented as part of the Proposed Action to reduce impacts to special status species and vegetation.
13. The Proposed Action does not violate any known Federal, State, local, or tribal law or requirements. Section 4.1 of the EA describes permits, licenses, and easements to be obtained prior to construction, maintenance, and decommissioning associated with the Proposed Action in areas subject to the regulatory or permitting authority of a public entity.

Finding of No Significant Impact

Based upon the analysis presented in the Final EA, Reclamation has determined the Proposed Action will not have a significant adverse effect on the human environment. Therefore, an EIS is not warranted.

Documents Referenced

Department of Interior. 2018. Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2018 -2022.

<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/uploads/fy2018-2022-strategic-plan.pdf>. Last Accessed September 13, 2022.

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. March 2022. Notice of Public Scoping for an Environmental Assessment on the Proposed Arizona Public Service Queue 255 Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project, on the Navajo Nation in Coconino County, Arizona.

_____. August 2022. Draft Environmental Assessment – APS Queue 255 Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project.

_____. September 2022. Final Environmental Assessment – APS Queue 255 Interconnection and Gen-Tie Project.