



Department of Energy
Western Area Power Administration
P.O. Box 281213
Lakewood, CO 80228-8213

SUBJECT: Initial Notice of Public Scoping for an Environmental Assessment, Identification of Historic Properties and Notice of Floodplain and Wetland Action for the Sterling Solar 2 Interconnection Project

Dear Interested Party,

Pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA, 40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA, 36 CFR Part 800), Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) invites your participation in establishing the scope of environmental issues and studies associated with the Sterling Solar 2 Interconnection Project located near Golden Shores/Topock, Mohave County, Arizona (Sterling Solar 2) (see Figure 1).

Proposed Action

WAPA is a Federal power-marketing agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) that operates and maintains transmission lines and associated facilities in accordance with Section 211 of the Federal Power Act and its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (OATT). WAPA is responding to a request from Sterling Solar LLC, to interconnect their proposed Sterling Solar 2 photovoltaic solar facility to WAPA's nearby electrical transmission system (see Figure 1). WAPA is in the process of responding to a previous request from Sterling Solar LLC's on their Sterling Solar 1 project. That project was initiated in September 2019 with a similar scoping process. A Draft Environmental Assessment for Sterling Solar 1 was released on July 8, 2020. Because these are separate interconnection requests with separate timelines, WAPA will continue to prepare separate NEPA documentation but will include the effects of both projects in the cumulative effects section of the NEPA documents.

WAPA's OATT requires it to evaluate interconnection requests based on available transmission capacity, the safety and reliability of the bulk electrical system, and the results of environmental planning processes. WAPA lacks authority over the location of the requester's electrical generation facility and the methods and equipment used at that facility.

Sterling Solar LLC proposes to build, operate, and maintain an approximately 225-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic solar energy generation facility and battery storage facility on a 2,219-acre parcel of private land (project area/area of potential effects [APE]). Construction of the facility would include solar panels, access roads, an underground electrical collection system and

connection to a planned on-site substation. Sterling Solar 2's facilities are not part of WAPA's Federal action, but their potential indirect impacts/effects will be presented alongside that of the Federal action as part of a comprehensive analysis in a Draft Environmental Assessment.

WAPA anticipates that construction could begin as soon as Fall 2021. This start date depends on the completion of planning efforts described below and assumes that no significant environmental impacts are identified. Further information about the proposed project is available online at:

<https://www.wapa.gov/transmission/EnvironmentalReviewNEPA/Pages/Sterling-Solar-2.aspx>

Environmental Planning Processes

WAPA is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to evaluate the environmental effects of the Sterling Solar 2 Project based on the provisions in 10 CFR 1021 of the Department of Energy NEPA Implementing Procedures since this proposed project includes the interconnection of new generation that is less than 50 average megawatts.

Receiving this Notice of Public Scoping letter is the first step in the environmental review process. The additional steps of WAPA's environmental review process are reflected below:



More information on these steps and on NEPA can be found at:

https://www.energy.gov/sites/prod/files/nepapub/nepa_documents/RedDont/G-DOE-NEPA_Brochure.pdf

WAPA proposes to address the following planning requirements and seeks your input:

- **Clean Water Act & Executive Order 11988 Floodplain Management:** WAPA will assess the proposed action's impacts, if any, to waters of the U.S., floodplains, and wetlands, and comply with the requirements of applicable U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Section 404 permits. Sterling Solar LLC will apply for permits related to their facilities. We seek your input about floodplains located near the project area and ways to avoid or minimize impacts.
- **Endangered Species Act:** WAPA will serve as lead Federal agency and will evaluate threatened, endangered and other special status species and their habitat that could be affected by the proposed action and will consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as needed. WAPA will conduct a biological review of areas impacted. WAPA seeks your observations about the occurrence of protected species near the project area and suggestions on ways to avoid or minimize adverse effects.
- **NEPA:** WAPA will serve as lead Federal agency in the preparation of an Environmental Assessment of the proposed action and its impacts. WAPA seeks your comments about

alternatives and environmental issues that you would like to see presented in a Draft Environmental Assessment.

- NHPA: WAPA will serve as the lead Federal agency for Section 106 of the NHPA. WAPA seeks your suggestions about available sources of cultural resource information and applicable types of identification efforts. As WAPA plans to conduct a cultural resources field survey of the project area/APE it also seeks your input about the presence of historic properties or places of religious, traditional and cultural importance that may be impacted or affected by the proposed action.

Get Involved

WAPA would like to know of any environmental issues, concerns, and suggestions you may have regarding the proposed action, project area or APE. Your comments will help define issues and alternatives for consideration in the environmental review processes mentioned above. Comments can be provided in writing or by phone to the contact listed below:

Western Area Power Administration, HQ
ATTN: Andrew M. Montano, NEPA Document Manager
P.O. Box 281213
Lakewood, CO 80228-8213
(720) 962-7253
montano@wapa.gov

Please submit your scoping comments by **August 14, 2020** (post-mark by this date.) WAPA will consider late comments to the extent practicable.

Next Steps

WAPA intends to use the comments it receives to prepare a Draft Environmental Assessment, which we expect to be completed later this year. WAPA will then seek public comment on this document. WAPA looks forward to receiving your comments.

Sincerely,



Matthew Blevins
Environmental Manager

Enclosure

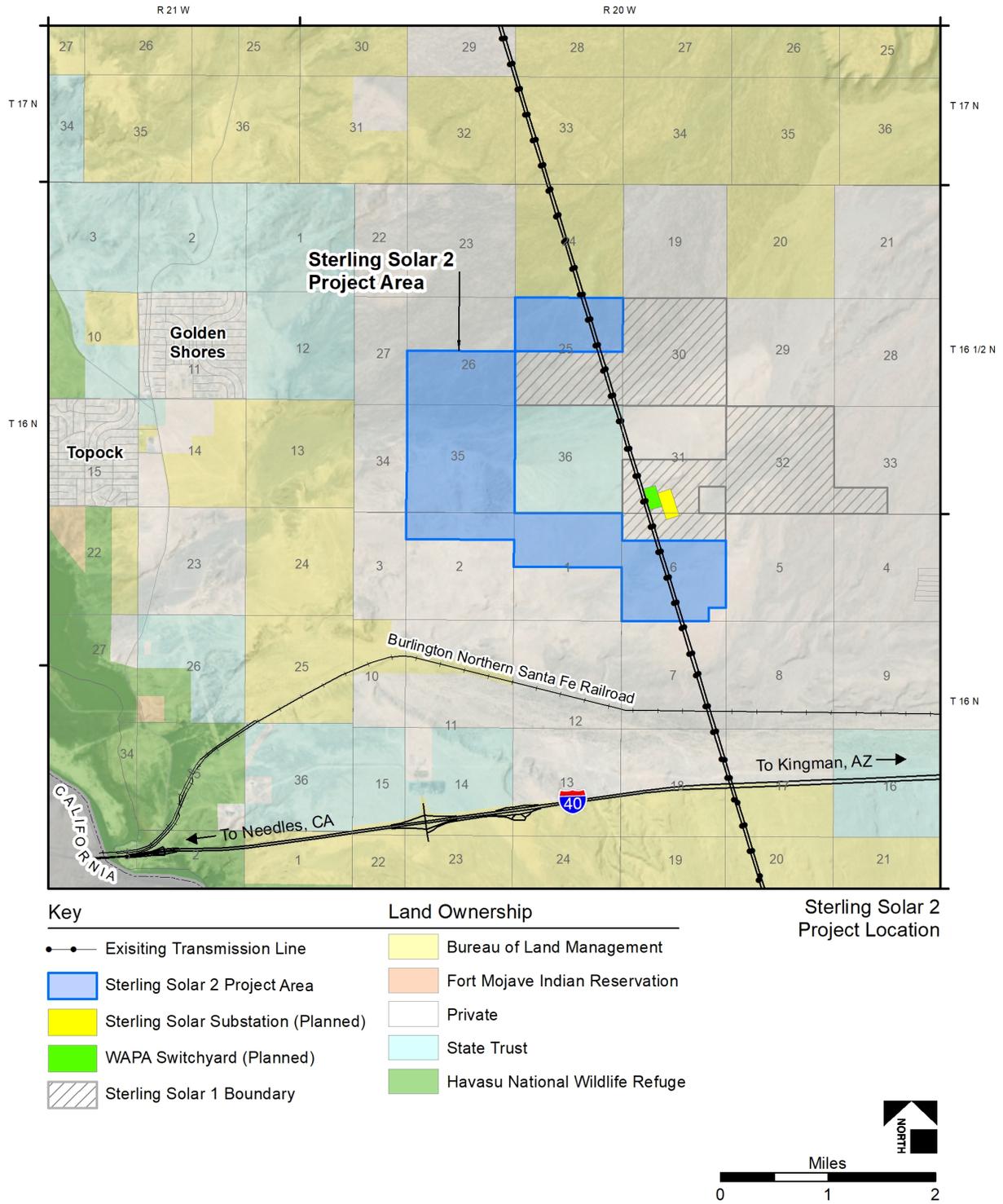


Figure 1. Sterling Solar 2 Project Location