

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Front Range - Midway Solar Interconnection Project
El Paso County, Colorado**

DOE/EA-2018

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

On May 20, 2014, Front Range - Midway Solar (Midway Solar) submitted an interconnection request to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to interconnect Midway Solar's proposed photovoltaic (PV) solar electric generation facility (proposed Project) and WAPA's existing Midway Substation. The project is located 8 miles south of the City of Fountain in El Paso County, Colorado. Midway Solar will be the developer, contractor, and operator of the Project.

WAPA is a federal power marketing agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Under its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (Tariff), WAPA is required to respond to Midway Solar's interconnection request. WAPA's Tariff conforms to section 211 of the Federal Power Act and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) Final Orders addressing non-discriminatory transmission system access. WAPA's Tariff provides for interconnections to WAPA's transmission system by all eligible entities, consistent with, and subject to environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other environmental regulations. Under its Tariff, WAPA must offer access to capacity on its transmission system, when capacity is available, on a non-discriminatory basis. WAPA also needs to ensure that by offering such capacity, existing transmission system reliability and service is not degraded by new or additional generation interconnections.

In accordance with applicable law and regulations, WAPA prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), entitled *Environmental Assessment for the Front Range - Midway Solar, LLC Interconnection Project* (DOE/EA-2018). WAPA's purpose and need for the EA is to consider the interconnection request in accordance with its Tariff. WAPA's proposed Federal action is to execute an interconnection agreement with Midway Solar to interconnect the proposed PV solar electric generation facility and WAPA's existing Midway Substation. WAPA would be required to build a new 230-kilovolt (kV) bay within the Midway Substation; install new communications and protection equipment within the substation's control building; and install new take-off and gen-tie structures to direct the 230-kV transmission line into the new bay. Depending on final design, WAPA may be required to alter existing 115-kV and 230-kV transmission lines entering and exiting the Midway Substation to accommodate the proposed 230-kV gen-tie transmission line connecting the substation with the solar facility. Outside of the scope of this EA, Midway Solar may opt to interconnect into an adjacent substation owned by Public Service Company of

Colorado (PSCo) which would require obtaining a licensing agreement across WAPA-owned property. This agreement would be subject to an environmental review, payment of fair market value, and confirmation that the design would not interfere with WAPA's operations.

WAPA's Federal action does not include Midway Solar's proposed Project, which would be constructed, owned, operated, and maintained by Midway Solar. However, WAPA's EA analyzed and disclosed the potential environmental impacts of Midway Solar's proposed Project. The EA identified no significant impacts to environmental resources resulting from either WAPA's Federal action or Midway Solar's proposed Project.

The Draft EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on July 19, 2016. The public comment period ended on August 19, 2016. No comments were received during the comment period for the Draft EA. Based on the information contained in the EA, WAPA's Federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. WAPA has determined that proposed Federal action described above does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Thus, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and WAPA is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The Final EA is approved concurrently with this FONSI.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION:

Additional information and copies of the EA and this FONSI are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

Brian Little, Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist
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This FONSI will be sent directly to individuals who previously requested a copy. A notification of availability will be sent to other potentially affected parties. A copy of the Final EA and this FONSI are also available on the following website:

https://www.wapa.gov/regions/RM/environment/Pages/Front_Range-Midway_Solar_Interconnection_Project.aspx

For further information on the DOE NEPA process, contact:

Ms. Carol M. Borgstrom
Director, Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance, GC-54
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20585
Phone: (202) 586-4600 or (800) 472-2756

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

This FONSI was prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR 1508.13, and the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures, 10 CFR 1021.322. The FONSI briefly presents the reasons why WAPA's proposal to execute an interconnection agreement for the Midway Solar Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Execution of the interconnection agreement would allow Midway Solar to interconnect their proposed Project to WAPA's existing Midway substation. WAPA's EA evaluated the environmental effects of WAPA's proposed Federal action and also included an analysis and disclosure of the potential environmental impacts of Midway Solar's proposed Project.

WAPA's PROPOSED FEDERAL ACTION:

WAPA's proposed Federal action is to execute an interconnection agreement with Midway Solar to interconnect the proposed PV solar electric generation facility and WAPA's existing Midway Substation. WAPA would be required to build a new 230- kV bay within the Midway Substation; install new communications and protection equipment within the substation's control building; and install new take-off and gen-tie structures to direct the 230-kV transmission line into the new bay. Depending on final design, WAPA may be required to alter existing 115-kV and 230-kV transmission lines entering and exiting the Midway Substation to accommodate the proposed 230-kV gen-tie transmission line connecting the substation with the solar facility.

Midway SOLAR'S PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

Midway Solar proposes to construct two main but connected components: a 100-MW PV solar electric generation facility and the associated gen-tie line to connect the solar facility to WAPA's Midway Substation. The proposed Project would consist of PV panels, tracking system, and associated electric power collection system, with light-duty gravel covered service roads and would occupy approximately 911 acres. A full and complete Project description is included in the EA.

COMMENTS RECEIVED ON THE PRE-APPROVAL EA:

No formal public comments, questions, or concerns were received. The Northern Arapaho Tribe of the Wind River Reservation requested the opportunity to participate in the cultural resources site survey; however, the survey was completed at the time of the request. The Northern Arapaho Tribal Historic Preservation Office was given an opportunity to review the Class III Cultural Resources Inventory report. Further details of WAPA's and Midway Solar's public scoping and tribal consultation efforts are included in the Final EA.

ALTERNATIVES:

DOE's NEPA regulations require that an EA include the proposed action and the no action alternative (10 CFR 1022.321(c)).

WAPA's above-described proposed Federal action was considered. In addition, as part of the EA, WAPA evaluated modifications to existing 115-kV and 230-kV transmission lines entering and exiting the Midway Substation to accommodate the proposed 230-kV gen-tie transmission line connecting the substation with the solar facility.

Under the No Action Alternative, WAPA would not execute an interconnection agreement with Midway Solar and the proposed Project would not be constructed or interconnected to WAPA's transmission system. WAPA would continue to operate the Midway Substation, however the construction activities associated with the proposed Action would not occur. Midway Solar could continue to pursue the proposed Project by applying for an interconnection into an adjacent substation owned by PSCo which would require obtaining a licensing agreement across WAPA-owned property. This agreement would be subject to an environmental review, payment of fair market value, and confirmation that that the design would not interfere with WAPA's operations. For the purpose of the Final EA and this FONSI, which discusses WAPA's proposed Action, the No Action Alternative is considered to result in the proposed Project not being constructed, and thus provides a baseline against which the proposed Action can be evaluated.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF WAPA'S ACTION:

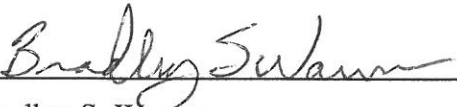
The execution of an interconnection agreement with Midway Solar to connect the proposed Project to WAPA's Midway Substation and taking possession of: a new 230-kV bay within the Midway Substation; new communications and protection equipment within the substation's control building; new take-off and gen-tie structures to direct the 230-kV transmission line into the new bay, and, depending on final design, WAPA may be required to alter existing 115-kV and 230-kV transmission lines entering and exiting the Midway Substation to accommodate the proposed 230-kV gen-tie transmission line connecting the substation with the solar facility. WAPA's Federal action will have no significant impact to environmental resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF FRONT RANGE MIDWAY SOLAR'S PROPOSED PROJECT:

The EA evaluated the potential for Midway Solar's proposed Project to impact environmental resources found in the proposed Project area. Midway Solar has incorporated WAPA's Standard Construction Practices and Best Management Practices into the description of its proposed Project. The analysis of environmental impacts identified no potential impacts that would be considered significant and no mitigation measures that should be implemented additional to those already embedded within the proposed project description. The principal reasons for the lack of significant environmental impact was the avoidance of sensitive resources during siting of the solar facility, the minor amount of disturbance at structure locations, and Midway Solar's efforts to work cooperatively with affected landowners.

DETERMINATION:

WAPA will allow 15 days of public review after publication of this statement of findings before implementing the Proposed Action. Based on the information contained in the EA, WAPA's Federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. WAPA has determined that it's proposed Federal action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and WAPA is issuing this FONSI.



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Western Area Power Administration
U.S. Department of Energy

9.21-16

Date