

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT  
FOR THE  
SUMMIT WIND ENERGY PROJECT  
GRANT COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA  
DOE/EA – 1979**

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

**ACTION: Approval of Environmental Assessment and Issuance of Finding of No Significant Impact**

**SUMMARY:** In March 2013, Summit Wind Farm, LLC (Summit) submitted an interconnection request to the Western Area Power Administration (Western) to connect its proposed Summit Wind Farm Project (Project) to Western's Summit-Watertown 115kV transmission line, via an interconnection tap within the project footprint approximately 2 miles south of Summit, South Dakota.

Under its Open Access Transmission Tariff (OATT), Western is required to respond to Summit's interconnection request. Western'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. Western's Tariff provides for new interconnections to Western'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, Western must offer access to capacity on its transmission system when capacity is available, on a non-discriminatory basis. Western also needs to ensure that by offering such capacity, existing transmission system reliability and service are not degraded by new interconnections.

In accordance with applicable regulations, Western prepared an environmental assessment (EA) entitled Summit Wind Project Final Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1979). Western's purpose and need is to consider the interconnection request in accordance with its Tariff. Western's proposed Federal action is 1) to execute an interconnection agreement to connect the proposed Project to Western's Summit-Watertown 115kV transmission line, and 2) to construct and operate a new interconnection tap to which the Project would connect.

Western's Federal action does not include Summit's proposed Project, which would be constructed, owned, operated, and maintained by Summit and is subject to South Dakota's statewide utility siting authority approval. However, Western's EA analyzed and disclosed the potential environmental impacts of Summit's proposed Project including the potential location for the Project substation, access roads, and underground collection lines. The EA identified no significant impacts to environmental resources resulting from either Western's Federal action or Summit's proposed Project.

Based on the information contained in the EA, Western's Federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. Western has determined that its action does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this finding of no significant impact (FONSI). The final EA is approved concurrently with this FONSI.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT:** Additional information and copies of the EA and this FONSI are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

Micah Reuber, Upper Great Plains NEPA Coordinator  
Western Area Power Administration

Upper Great Plains Customer Service Office

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Phone: (406) 255-2811 or (800) 358-3415

A copy of the EA and FONSI are also available at the following website:  
<http://www.wapa.gov/ugp/Environment/default.htm>.

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, SW. Washington, DC 20585

Phone: (202) 586-4600 or (800) 472-2756

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This FONSI was prepared in accordance with 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 Western's proposal to execute an interconnection agreement for the Summit Wind Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Execution of the interconnection agreement would allow Summit to interconnect its proposed Project to Western's transmission system. Western's EA evaluated the environmental effects of Western's proposed Federal action and also included an analysis and disclosure of the potential environmental impacts of Summit's proposed Project. The EA also referenced applicable conservation strategies and best management practices identified in the Upper Great Plains Wind Energy Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) finalized by Western and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in April 2015 (DOE/EIS-0408), which is available online at <http://plainswindeis.anl.gov/documents/fpeis/>.

**SUMMIT'S PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Summit proposes to construct and operate a maximum 90-MW wind energy facility located on privately owned land south of the city of Summit in Grant County, South Dakota. Construction of the Project is proposed to begin in 2015 and would be completed and in operation by the end of 2016. Summit has obtained leases from the private landowners to construct and operate the Project within the Project boundary.

The proposed Project would include 41 wind turbines, with generating capacity of 2.3 MW per turbine. Based on the wind regime at the site, the monopole tower design will have a hub height of 262 feet and a rotor diameter of 354 feet. In addition to the wind turbines, permanent support facilities at the Project would include one or two permanent meteorological towers, access roads, an underground communications and electricity collection system, a collector substation, and an operations and maintenance facility. The buried collector cables would transmit electricity at 34.5 kV from each turbine to the collector substation, where the voltage would be stepped up to the interconnection voltage of 115 kV. The electricity would then be conveyed across 50 to 100 feet of transmission line to an interconnection tap on Western's Summit-Watertown transmission line. A full and complete Project description is included in the EA.

**ALTERNATIVES:** DOE's NEPA regulations require that an EA include the proposed action and the no action alternative (10 CFR § 1021.321(c)). Under the no action alternative, Western would not execute an interconnection agreement or construct a new interconnection tap. Although a decision not to execute an

interconnection agreement would not necessarily stop construction of Summit's proposed Project, Western's no action alternative assumes that Summit's proposed Project would not be constructed.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** The EA contains specific information on notifications to tribes, landowners, members of the public, and various local, State, and Federal agencies. A tribal consultation meeting was held at the Dakota Magic Casino in Hankinson, North Dakota, to discuss the scope of the EA and National Historic Preservation Act compliance on February 11, 2014. A public scoping meeting was held in Summit, South Dakota, on February 12, 2014, to discuss the proposed Project, help determine important issues, and obtain local information relevant to the proposed Project. Summaries of the meetings and copies of correspondence received are included as appendices to the EA. All correspondence is available for review at Western's Upper Great Plains Regional Office.

**COMMENTS RECEIVED ON THE PRE-APPROVAL EA:** The Draft Final EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on November 21, 2014. The public comment period ended on December 29, 2014. One response letter was received from the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish, and Parks. The letter included numerous comments regarding the Project's potential impacts on wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wetlands. A comment response matrix is included in Appendix B addressing the letter comments. The Project has been designed to avoid impacts to wildlife, wildlife habitat, and wetlands as noted in the EA.

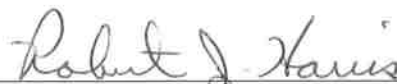
**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF WESTERN'S ACTION:** The execution of an interconnection agreement with Summit to connect the proposed Project to Western's Summit-Watertown transmission line and construction of a new interconnection tap will have no significant impacts to environmental resources.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF SUMMIT'S PROPOSED PROJECT:** The EA evaluated the potential for Summit's proposed Project to impact environmental resources found in the Project area. Summit has incorporated Western's Standard Construction Practices and Best Management Practices as described in the PEIS 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 in addition to those already embedded within the proposed Project description. The principal reasons for the lack of significant environmental impact include the avoidance of sensitive resources during siting of the wind facility, the minor amount of disturbance at structure locations, and Summit's efforts to work cooperatively with affected landowners.

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the information contained in the EA, Western's Federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. Western has determined that its action to execute an interconnection agreement to connect the proposed Project to Western's Summit-Watertown transmission line and to construct and operate a new interconnection tap does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA.

Therefore, considering the Project's avoidance and minimization measures and best management practices that are to be implemented over the course of the proposed Project, as described in the EA, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and Western is issuing this FONSI.

Issued at Billing, Montana on August 17, 2015



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Robert J. Harris  
Senior Vice President & UGP  
Regional Manager

