

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
SUNFLOWER WIND ENERGY PROJECT
MORTON AND STARK COUNTIES, NORTH DAKOTA
DOE/EA – 1966

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 October 2009, Sunflower Wind Project, LLC (Sunflower) submitted an interconnection request to the Western Area Power Administration (Western) to connect its proposed Sunflower Wind Energy Project (Project) to Western's Dickinson-Mandan 230kV transmission line, via a new interconnection switchyard to be constructed approximately 4.5 miles south-southwest of Hebron, North Dakota.

Under its Open Access Transmission Tariff (OATT), Western is required to respond to Sunflower'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 is not degraded by new interconnections.

In accordance with applicable regulations, Western prepared an environmental assessment (EA) entitled Sunflower Wind Project Final Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1966). Western's purpose and need is to consider the interconnection request in accordance with its Tariff. Western's proposed Federal action is to 1) execute an interconnection agreement to connect the proposed Project to Western's Dickinson-Mandan 230kV transmission line, 2) to construct and operate a new interconnection switchyard to which the Project would connect, and 3) to implement capacity upgrades to portions of two existing Western transmission lines to facilitate the addition of electrical energy from the Project onto the regional transmission system.

Western's Federal action does not include Sunflower's proposed Project, which would be constructed, owned, operated, and maintained by Sunflower and is subject to North Dakota's statewide utility siting authority approval. However, Western's EA analyzed and disclosed the potential environmental impacts of Sunflower's proposed Project including the potential location for the new switchyard, access road, and upgrades to the transmission system. The EA identified no significant impacts to environmental resources resulting from either Western's Federal action or Sunflower'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 to execute an interconnection agreement with Sunflower to connect the proposed Project to Western's Dickinson-Mandan transmission line, to

construct and operate a new interconnection switchyard, and to implement transmission capacity upgrades to portions of two existing Western transmission lines, 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:

Lou Hanebury, Environmental Protection Specialist
Western Area Power Administration
Upper Great Plains Customer Service Office
PO Box 35800
Billings, MT 59107-5800
hanebury@wapa.gov
Phone: (406) 255-2812 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 Sunflower Wind Project will not have a significant impact on the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Execution of the interconnection agreement would allow Sunflower to interconnect their 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 Sunflower's proposed Project.

SUNFLOWER'S PROPOSED PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Sunflower proposes to construct and operate a maximum 110-MW wind energy facility located on privately owned land south of the city of Hebron in Morton and Stark counties, North Dakota. Construction of the Project is proposed to begin in 2015 and would be completed and in operation by the end of 2015. Sunflower has obtained leases from the private landowners to construct and operate the Project within the Project boundary.

The proposed Project would include up to 64 wind turbines; five potential turbine models are considered, with generating capacity of 1.7 to 2.3 MW per turbine. Based on the wind regime at the site, the monopole tower design will have a hub height between 260 feet and 394 feet, and a rotor diameter of up to 361 feet, depending on specific turbine model utilized. To allow for flexibility of turbine placement, micro-siting corridors were considered and evaluated as part of Sunflower's proposed Project. The specific location of turbines and associated infrastructure has not been determined, but would be entirely within

the defined micrositing corridors. In addition to the wind turbines, permanent support facilities at the Project would include 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 230 kV. The electricity would then be conveyed to the adjacent interconnection switchyard, to be constructed by Western; no new transmission line would be needed. 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 1022.321(c)). Under the no action alternative, Western would not execute an interconnection agreement or construct a new switchyard or related transmission capacity improvements. Although a decision not to execute an interconnection agreement would not necessarily stop construction of Sunflower's proposed Project, Western's no action alternative assumes that Sunflower'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. Public scoping meetings were held in Dickinson, North Dakota, on August 22, 2013, to discuss the proposed Project, to help determine important issues, and obtain local information relevant to the proposed Project. A public open house informational meeting was held December 3, 2013 in Hebron, North Dakota. 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 May 19, 2014. The public comment period ended on June 20, 2014. One response letter was received, from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. The NRCS noted that the Project would not fall under the Farmland Policy Protection Act, and recommended that impacts to wetlands be avoided in order to avoid potential loss of benefits under the Wetland Conservation Provisions of the 1985 Food Security Act, as amended. The Project has been designed to avoid impacts to wetlands as noted in the EA.

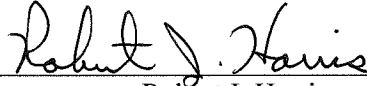
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF WESTERN'S ACTION: The execution of an interconnection agreement with Sunflower to connect the proposed Project to Western's Dickinson-Mandan transmission line, construction of a new interconnection switchyard, and implementation of transmission capacity improvements will have no significant impacts to environmental resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF SUNFLOWER'S PROPOSED PROJECT: The EA evaluated the potential for Sunflower's proposed Project to impact environmental resources found in the Project area. Sunflower has incorporated Western'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 include the avoidance of sensitive resources during siting of the wind facility, the minor amount of disturbance at structure locations, and Sunflower'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 Dickinson-Mandan transmission line, to construct and operate a new interconnection switchyard, and to implement additional transmission capacity upgrades 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 as described in the EA that are to be implemented over the course of the proposed Project, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required and Western is issuing this FONSI.

Issued at Billing, Montana on October 7, 2014

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Robert J. Harris", is positioned above a horizontal line.

Robert J. Harris
Regional Manager