

FINDING OF NO NEW SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment for Phase 1 Turbine Development

Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project

December 2014

BLM

Rawlins Field Office



The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, cultural, and other resources on public lands.

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INTRODUCTION

The environmental assessment (EA) analysis shows that the proposed action—to authorize the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of the Phase 1 Turbine Development described in the EA—would have no significant effects beyond those already analyzed and disclosed in the 2012 Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project (CCSM) and Approved Visual Resource Management Plan Amendment Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). This EA is tiered to the CCSM FEIS and conforms with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Rawlins Field Office (RFO) Resource Management Plan (RMP).

Following the tiering procedures described in Appendix C of the CCSM Project Record of Decision (ROD), the BLM concludes that some impacts from the facilities proposed in the Phase 1 Turbine Development site-specific plans of development (SPOD-4) may not have been sufficiently analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS, necessitating this EA. The CCSM Project FEIS analyzes and discloses environmental impacts including significant impacts to some environmental resources. The EA compares the site-specific plans of development against the analysis conducted in the CCSM Project FEIS to identify and evaluate any additional or new environmental impacts that were not addressed in the EIS.

I have determined that the proposed action will not cause significant impacts to the human environment beyond those previously described in the CCSM Project FEIS. No new significant impacts were disclosed while completing the analysis for this EA. Therefore, consistent with Department of the Interior regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (43 C.F.R. § 140(c)), the BLM does not need to complete an additional EIS before authorizing the Phase I Turbine Development.

The proposed action, which incorporates all of the environmental constraints, applicant-committed measures and mitigation measures contained in CCSM Project ROD Appendix D, as well as all of the conditions of the ROD, would not create any additional significant effects (above those already disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS), which would have sufficient context and intensity, as defined in section 7.3 of the BLM National Environmental Policy Act Handbook (Manual H-1790-1, page 70), to be considered significant. Appendix D in the CCSM project FEIS (Appendix C in this EA) includes timing and distance stipulations to reduce impacts to multiple resources. Chapter 4 of the EA describes the impacts of the proposed action on the applicable resources and sets forth the reasons, with respect to each resource, that the proposed action would either have no significant impacts or no new significant impacts beyond the scope and intensity of the impacts analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS. Based on the significance criteria identified in CCSM Final EIS, significant impacts to the following resources could occur, bats, Greater Sage-Grouse, mule deer, raptors, passerine birds, soils, livestock grazing within individual pastures, historic properties where setting is an aspect of integrity and noise impacts on two residences.

The direct take of an eagle from the Phase 1 Turbine Development is anticipated and as such,

the USFWS is request a programmatic take permit for the proposed action. USFWS is preparing an EIS for an Eagle Take Permit (ETP) for the first phase of turbine development.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both regarding the context and intensity of impacts described in the EA and supporting documents. The interdisciplinary team checklist attached as EA Appendix B and the analysis in Chapter 4 provide detail on the expected impacts of the separate elements of the proposed action on the resources present in the project area and the reasons why those impacts are either not significant or are within the range of impacts previously analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS.

CONTEXT

The project identifies site-specific actions involving 3,035 acres of initial surface disturbance and 485 acres of long-term surface disturbance on public, state, and private lands in Carbon County, Wyoming. Power Company of Wyoming LLC (PCW) has applied for right-of-way grants for the construction, operation, maintenance and decommissioning of Phase 1 Turbine Development.

The Phase I Wind Turbine Development includes 500 wind turbine generators and associated facilities for the CCSM Project such as roads, electrical lines, substations, operation and maintenance buildings, meteorological towers, utilities, and temporary construction features.

The initial surface disturbance for the CCSM Project analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b) was 7,733 acres, with a long-term disturbance of 1,545 acres. Table 2-1 identifies the estimated initial surface disturbance and long-term surface disturbance for the CCSM Project by project component based on the information provided in the Phase I Wind Turbine Development SPOD and the infrastructure component SPODs . Table 2-1 provides a cumulative comparison of surface disturbance acreages to those provided in the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b). The CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b) analyzes the entire CCSM Project; therefore, Table 2-1 compares the surface disturbance of the entire CCSM Project with the surface disturbance for the CCSM Project Infrastructure Components, Phase I Wind Turbine Development, and Phase II Wind Turbine Development (as anticipated). In addition, Table 2-1 identifies the acres of activity areas by project component. Surface disturbance estimates presented below represent the best available information.

Table 2-1. Surface Disturbance Acreage for the Proposed Action Compared to the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Final Environmental Impact Statement

CCSM Project Component	Project Phase	EA Number	Initial Disturbance ¹ (acres)	Long-Term Disturbance ¹ (acres)	Activity Area ² (acres)
Phase I Haul Road and Facilities	I	1	875	225	0
West Sinclair Rail Facility			370	121	0
Road Rock Quarry			184	18	0
Phase I Wind Turbine Development	I	2	3,035	485	440
Phase II Wind Turbine Development ³	II	3	2,866	482	409
Current Disturbance Estimate	N/A	N/A	7,330	1,331	N/A
CCSM Project FEIS Disturbance Estimate	N/A	N/A	7,733	1,545	N/A
Change	N/A	N/A	-403	-214	N/A

Sources: BLM 2012a, 2012b; PCW 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015

¹Initial disturbance areas are defined as the total area of surface disturbance and includes both the areas that would be reclaimed and the long-term disturbance. The initial disturbance areas would be reclaimed following construction in accordance with the Master Reclamation Plan, included as Appendix D of the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b) and the site-specific reclamation plan, included as Appendix L of the Phase I Wind Turbine Development SPOD (PCW 2015a). Long-term disturbance is defined as areas that would be reclaimed in accordance with these plans following decommissioning.

²Activity areas are areas where project activities may occur that do not require ground disturbance (would not be cleared or graded); thick vegetation higher than one foot may be trimmed to allow for safe vehicle access and minimize fire potential.

³The Phase II Haul Road and Facilities will be included in the Phase II Wind Turbine Development site-specific plan of development.

CCSM Chokecherry and Sierra Madre
 EA Environmental Assessment
 FEIS Final Environmental Impact Statement
 N/A not applicable

INTENSITY

The considerations listed in 40 CFR 1508.27(b) (1-10) was used to evaluate the intensity of the effects described in the EA:

1. There would be no new significant effects as a result of approving the proposed action beyond those already disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS as discussed in detail in the EA. See the discussions in Chapter 4 of the EA for the analysis of the impacts of the proposed action on the respective resources described. The proposed action would result in both beneficial and adverse impacts.
2. The public's health and safety would not be significantly affected (see Section 4.2.9 and 4.2.15 of the EA). There would be no new adverse social or economic effects beyond those disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS (see Section 4.2.7).

3. Neither the Rawlins RMP review nor interdisciplinary review found any new unique characteristics in the geographic area or ecologically critical areas which would be adversely affected, beyond those disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS (see Appendix B, Interdisciplinary Team Checklist). Appendix B, categorized each resource into categories for analyzing impacts, as follows:

- “Not Present” (NP) – the resource does not occur in the CCSM Project Area for the Proposed Action and is not carried forward for detailed analysis.
- “Not Impacted” (NI) – the resource was sufficiently analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b) or it can be reasonably concluded that the resource would not be affected to a degree that requires analysis and therefore it is not carried forward for detailed analysis.
- “Potentially Impacted” (PI) – the resource is present in the CCSM Project Area for the proposed phase 1 turbine development, and, based on the BLM’s review of the results of scoping and procedures outlined in Appendix A of this EA, it may be potentially impacted.

4. The effects of the proposed action are within the scope and scale of effects analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS. Air and Atmospheric Values, Cultural Resources and Native American Concern, National Scenic and Historic Trail, Paleontological Resource, Range Resource, North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA), Socioeconomic, Soil, Transportation, Vegetation (including Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species, and Wetlands and Riparian Zones, Visual Resource, Water Resource, Wildlife and Fisheries Resource, Special Status Species, and Noise and Human Health were analyzed in this EA for description in Chapter 3 (Affected Environment) and analysis in Chapter 4 (Environmental Consequences). For some resources, new site-specific information may be available based on site investigations conducted during 2012 and 2013, and this information is presented in Chapter 3 of this EA to the extent that it is relevant to the Phase 1 Turbine Development SPOD.

5. The effects of constructing, operating and maintaining the proposed action, are as described in the EA. There would not be a high uncertainty of the effects, nor any new unique or unknown risks not previously discussed in the CCSM Project FEIS. The CCSM Project ROD determined that wind energy development is appropriate within the 219,707-acre conceptual area of development described in detail and referred to as the Application Area.

6. This proposal does not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects beyond those described in the CCSM Project FEIS, and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The ROD allows for issuance of multiple ROW grants. The Phase I turbine development will be granted under a wind energy development grant.

7. Though the proposed action is related to the wind energy development project analyzed in the CCSM Project FEIS, this proposal is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant effects beyond those that were considered in the CCSM Project FEIS. The BLM has reviewed the list of current and planned projects disclosed in Table 5.0-1 of the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b; pages 5-2 through 5-5), to determine if any new projects, not included in this table, are applicable to this EA. No new reasonably foreseeable

actions were identified. As a result, the reasonably foreseeable actions disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS (BLM 2012b) are applicable to the Proposed Action of this EA.

8. The proposal will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places in a manner or degree beyond that disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS (see Sections 4.2.2 and 4.2.11 of the EA). Eight sites considered eligible for listing in the NRHP were identified during the Class III cultural resources inventories within the Phase I Wind Turbine Development Site.

9. There would be no new effects to habitat for threatened or endangered species beyond those disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS. Construction timing restrictions, design features and additional mitigation measures would minimize or prevent adverse effects to other wildlife species and their habitat (see Sections 4.2.13 and 4.2.14 of the EA).

10. Approving the proposed action would not violate any federal, state, or local laws or regulations imposed for the protection of the environment (see section 1.5 and 1.6 of the EA).

For the reasons set forth above and as explained in the EA, I conclude that the proposed action will have no new significant impacts on the human environment that were not adequately disclosed in the CCSM Project FEIS.

Dennis J. Carpenter
Rawlins Field Manager

Date