



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Arizona State Office
One North Central Avenue, Suite 800
Phoenix, Arizona 85004-4427
www.blm.gov/arizona



In Reply Refer To:
2800 (AZ920)
AZA 038364

To: Tracy Stone-Manning
Director

From: Raymond Suazo
State Director, Arizona

Subject: Concurrence Request to Initiate the National Environmental Policy Act
Process for the Socorro Solar Project Application in a Solar Variance Area

RECOMMENDATION

In accordance with the Record of Decision for the Solar Energy Development Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, Appendix B, signed October 12, 2012 (Solar PEIS ROD), and 43 CFR 2800, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Arizona State Office, has completed the solar variance review process and determined that it is appropriate to continue processing the Socorro Solar Project application. BLM AZ is requesting concurrence on the State Director's Socorro Solar Project Variance Determination.

BACKGROUND

The BLM Lake Havasu Field Office received a right-of-way application (AZA 038364) from EDF Renewables for the Socorro Solar Project on November 24, 2021. The proposed project covers 5,860 acres in La Paz County, AZ. It would generate an estimated 350 megawatts of electricity, to be delivered to market via the Ten West Link 500-kilovolt bulk transmission line. In addition to the variance requirements found in Appendix B of the Solar PEIS, applications in Arizona must also adhere to the guidance provided in the Renewable Arizona: Restoration Design Energy Project.

Lands outside of a Solar Energy Zone, as designated in the Solar PEIS ROD, are considered variance lands. Developers proposing utility-scale solar energy development on variance lands must demonstrate to the BLM that a solar energy project proposal will avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse effects on sensitive resources prior to proceeding to application processing and analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This demonstration includes at least three meetings. First, the applicant meets with the BLM and members of its interdisciplinary team to assess resource management plan conformance, potential for sensitive resource conflicts, and known matters of concern to stakeholders including federally recognized Tribes and environmental justice communities. Second, the applicant meets with BLM and potentially interested Federal and local government agencies to discuss questions, concerns, and issues that may require further consultation and cooperation. Third, the applicant attends a meeting with the general public to present the proposal and address questions and concerns. As a matter of practice, BLM AZ initiates early consultation with sovereign Tribal Nations and

invites them to submit comments and coordinate on a site visit to better understand potential impacts to cultural resources. Findings from these meetings culminate in a consideration as to whether the proposed project is in an area with low resource conflict(s), and to what extent resource conflict issues may be addressed or mitigated through further processing of the application.

In accordance with the Solar PEIS ROD, concurrence of the BLM Director with a State Director's determination of appropriateness is required for a variance application for solar development to be processed. Concurrence will not approve the proposed project; rather, it would allow the BLM to continue processing the application and initiate its NEPA process, including public scoping and the preparation of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Through the process, the potential impacts from the development of this proposal can be thoroughly analyzed. This analysis would serve as the basis for any future decision to either approve or deny the project.

BLM AZ conducted a variance area review process that went above and beyond the minimum requirements described above. The attached briefing memorandum further describes the coordination BLM AZ completed as a part of the variance area review process and the potential issues to address during the NEPA review process.

STATE DIRECTOR DETERMINATION

Following review through the variance process, I have determined that the Socorro Solar Project should continue to be processed and should proceed to the NEPA analysis phase. The project is generally proposed in an area of low resource conflict. There are minor conflicts with wildlife habitat and recreation access that warrant further consideration in alternatives to be analyzed through the process. There are no known issues pertaining to impacts on environmental justice communities, and early Tribal consultation has not yielded substantial concerns about the project. I am requesting the BLM Director's concurrence to proceed with the NEPA for the right-of-way application for the Socorro Solar Project.

CONCURRENCE BY THE DIRECTOR

_____ CONCUR

_____ DO NOT CONCUR

Tracy Stone-Manning
Director

Attachments (4)