

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Sterling Solar 1 Interconnection Project,  
Mohave County, Arizona  
DOE/EA-2124

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

**ACTION:** Finding of No Significant Impact

**BACKGROUND:** U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) proposes to approve Sterling Solar LLC's application to interconnect its proposed facility to the Black Mesa to Topock 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and enter into an interconnection agreement. Though this line is owned by the Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), it is operated and maintained by WAPA, and is part of the Central Arizona Project power system. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) previously issued a right-of-way (ROW) to Reclamation for this transmission line. The interconnection agreement's purpose is to ensure that the request will not degrade existing transmission reliability and service.

In association with the interconnection agreement, WAPA would:

- 1) Seek approval from Reclamation for the proposed changes to the transmission line;
- 2) Install and maintain a tap on the Black Mesa-Topock 230 kV transmission line consisting of four new three-pole structures and associated overhead conductors of which two of the four new tap structures would be partially located in the existing transmission line ROW;
- 3) Construct a new interconnection switchyard up to 17 acres; and,
- 4) Replace the existing static wire ground wire with new overhead fiber optic grounding wire on the Topock-Black Mesa 230-kV transmission line between the Topock and Black Mesa substations and looping the new fiber optic grounding wire through the new interconnection switchyard. This will require submitting an application to BLM to amend the existing ROW to allow for the installation of the new fiber optic grounding wire.

The proposed interconnection tap would be located on privately-owned land adjacent to the existing Black Mesa-Topock and North Havasu-Topock 230-kV transmission line ROWs, in Section 31 of Township 16.5 North, Range 20 West on the Gila and Salt River Baseline and Meridian (GSRBM).

BLM plans to respond to WAPA's application for installation of the new 38-mile overhead fiber optic grounding that would connect the existing Topock and Black Mesa substations looping in the new interconnection switchyard required for this project. BLM would seek concurrence from Reclamation about any encroachments on the existing transmission line ROW.

Sterling Solar LLC proposes to build, operate, maintain, and decommission an approximately 225 MW PV solar energy generation facility on a 2,077-acre of private land. An additional up-to 225 MW battery energy storage system would be added based on market considerations. Sterling Solar LLC would operate the entire facility such that the annual output is equal to or less

than 50 average megawatts. Sterling Solar LLC's construction of the facility would include the following components:

- 1) Installing solar panels;
- 2) Installing underground collection lines from each panel to a collection point switchyard;
- 3) Constructing access roads within the facility for construction and maintenance;
- 4) Constructing an on-site collection point substation covering up to 20 acres;
- 5) Installing and maintaining an onsite aerial connection from the Sterling Solar 1 substation to the WAPA switchyard via a single structure; and
- 6) Installation of up to 225 MW of battery storage.

The facility would be located on private land approximately 2.5 miles east of Golden Shores and 3.5 miles east of Topock, Arizona. The project area covers 2,077 acres located approximately 2.3 miles north of Interstate 40. The average elevation of the project area is approximately 250 feet above mean sea level. The entire project area would be located in Section 6, Township 16 North, Range 20 West, Section 25, Township 16.5 North, Range 20.5 West, and Sections 30, 31, 32, and 33, of Township 16.5 North, Range 20 West, on the GSRBM, Mohave County, Arizona.

WAPA prepared a Final Environmental Assessment analyzing the Proposed Action and a No Action Alternative. It is titled "*Sterling Solar 1 Interconnection Project, Final Environmental Assessment, DOE/EA-2124*" and is dated September 2020. WAPA is the lead Federal agency and the BLM (Lake Havasu Field Office) and Reclamation are cooperating agencies. WAPA incorporates this EA by reference.

The Proposed Action will not affect listed species or designated critical habitat protected by the Endangered Species Act. WAPA consulted with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and consulting parties under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act. On September 1, 2020, the SHPO concurred with WAPA's finding of no historic properties affected (SHPO-2019-2538(155443)).

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the analysis contained in DOE/EA-2124, WAPA finds that the Proposed Action to approve Sterling Solar LLC's application and enter into an interconnection agreement does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and WAPA issues this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

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

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The Final EA and FONSI can be downloaded from WAPA's or DOE's website at:  
<https://www.wapa.gov/transmission/EnvironmentalReviewNEPA/Pages/Sterling-Solar-1.aspx>  
<https://www.energy.gov/nepa/nepa-documents>

For further information on DOE's NEPA process, contact:

Mr. Brian Costner, Director  
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