

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Sterling Solar 2 Interconnection Project
Mohave County, Arizona
DOE/EA-2141

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) implement project-related transmission system upgrades that consist of removing and replacing four disconnect switches and their associated foundations and support structures at the existing Black Mesa Substation and performing switching of the existing disconnects at the WAPA switchyard associated with Sterling Solar 1 to ensure proper synchronization of the proposed solar facility with WAPA's electrical transmission system; and,
- 2) conduct reprogramming at Topock Substation for the proposed facility to integrate with their electrical transmission system.

The proposed interconnection 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). Because the Sterling Solar 2 facility would loop through the WAPA Sterling Solar 1 switchyard and interconnection, WAPA would not need to construct a new switchyard for Sterling Solar 2, and no new ground disturbance would occur.

Sterling Solar LLC proposes to build, operate, maintain, and decommission an approximately 225 MW PV solar energy generation facility on a 2,219-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 an existing collection point substation.
- 3) Constructing access roads within the facility for construction and maintenance.
- 4) Installation of up to 225 MW of battery storage.

The facility would be located on private land approximately 1.5 miles east of Golden Shores and 2.5 miles east of Topock, Arizona. The project area covers 2,219 acres located approximately 1.5 miles north of Interstate 40 (I-40). The average elevation of the project area is approximately 250 feet above mean sea level. The entire project area would be located within Section 6, Township (T) 16 North (N), Range (R) 20 West (W), Sections 1 and 2, T16N R20.5W, and Sections 25, 26, and 35, T16.5N, R20.5W, GSRBM, Mohave County, Arizona.

WAPA prepared a Final Environmental Assessment analyzing the Proposed Action and a No Action Alternative. It is titled “*Sterling Solar 2 Interconnection Project, Final Environmental Assessment, DOE/EA-2141*” and is dated March 2021. WAPA is the lead Federal agency and Reclamation is a cooperating agency. 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 December 23, 2019, the SHPO concurred with WAPA’s finding of no historic properties affected (SHPO-2019-2538(151913)).

DETERMINATION: Based on the analysis contained in DOE/EA-2141, 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:

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