

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION  
SIERRA NEVADA REGION**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Beale WAPA Interconnection Project  
Yuba County, California  
DOE/EA-2152**

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

**ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact**

On March 8, 2016, Beale Air Force Base (AFB) submitted an interconnection request to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to provide an interconnection from WAPA's existing Cottonwood-Roseville transmission line to Beale AFB in Yuba County, California. The project would be located on the west side of Beale AFB, approximately 10 miles east of the city of Marysville, California. The interconnection would improve the resiliency of the Beale AFB power network and increase the energy supply needed to support current and future missions. WAPA and Beale AFB are joint lead agencies under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and each would construct and own portions of the interconnection line. There are no cooperating agencies.

WAPA is a federal power marketing agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Under its Open Access Transmission Tariff (OATT), WAPA is required to respond to Beale AFB's interconnection request. WAPA's OATT provides for interconnections to WAPA's transmission system by all eligible entities consistent with and subject to environmental review under NEPA and other environmental regulations. Under its OATT, WAPA must offer access to capacity on its transmission system, when capacity is available, on a non-discriminatory basis. WAPA also must ensure that by offering such capacity, existing transmission system reliability and service is not degraded by new or additional generation interconnections. The Reclamation Project Act of 1939 requires WAPA to give preference to certain types of nonprofit organizations, including federal agencies.

**PROPOSED PROJECT**

As part of the proposed project, a 5-mile, 230-kilovolt (kV)/60-kV interconnection would be built between WAPA's Cottonwood-Roseville transmission line and an existing substation on Beale AFB. The proposed project would also require a new substation located on Beale AFB to accommodate both the 230-kV and 60-kV lines. Three alternative routes (and a No Action Alternative) were considered for the transmission interconnection line, which is located within Section 13 of Township 15 North, Range 4 East and Section 18 of Township 15 North, Range 5 East. In accordance with applicable laws and regulations, WAPA and Beale AFB prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), referred to as the EA for the Beale WAPA Interconnection Project (DOE/EA-2152). WAPA's purpose and need for the EA is to consider and respond to Beale AFB's interconnection request in accordance with WAPA's General Requirements for Interconnections (GRI). In processing interconnection requests received under the GRI, WAPA must ensure that existing reliability and service are not degraded. A System Impact Study (2017) concluded that no mitigation or system improvement is required to accommodate the Beale AFB interconnection request.

### WAPA'S PROPOSED FEDERAL ACTION

WAPA's proposed federal action would be to assist Beale AFB with design/engineering, construction, installation, and Operations and Maintenance (O&M) services for the interconnection project. WAPA would construct and perform O&M activities on the 230-kV portion of the project, which includes all infrastructure off-Beale AFB and all 230-kV infrastructure on-Base up to and including the new substation to be located on Beale AFB. Beale AFB would construct and perform O&M activities on the underground 60-kV portion of the project, up to and including the connection to the existing Doolittle Drive Substation.

The proposed federal action would have no impacts on scenic viewpoints, highways, forestlands, cultural resources, tribal lands, paleontological resources, geological hazards, floodplains, groundwater or surface water quality, land use or population growth, hazardous materials, potable water supplies, or wastewater facilities. Long-term beneficial impacts would occur to some aspects of storm drainage control and to the Beale AFB electrical and communications systems. Negligible to minor impacts would occur to aesthetics for residents in the immediate area, farming operations, greenhouse gas emissions, long-term climate change, vegetation communities and plants, geology and soils, stormwater runoff, surface water and wetlands, recreation, wildfire risk, electromagnetic field exposure, transportation and traffic, and solid waste management. Air quality would be mitigated to minor impacts that are less than significant. Some moderate impacts would occur to agricultural use and wildlife (including permanent removal of 10.07 acres of upland vegetation habitats for structures/roads and temporary disturbance of 44.27 acres of upland habitats from project construction activities). Minor impacts to seasonal wetland habitats would result from the installation of six new culverts for new access roads and the replacement of eight culverts on existing roads. Disturbance to wetland habitats resulting from culvert work would include 0.02 acres of permanent impacts and 0.05 acres of temporary impacts. No major long-term impacts on demographics or social services and conditions would be expected. No change in demand for housing, education, law enforcement, fire protection, emergency medical services, or medical services would be anticipated. Disproportionate impacts on minority or low-income populations would not be expected.

### FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

Executive Order (EO) 11990, Protection of Wetlands (May 24, 1977), directs agencies to avoid, to the extent possible, the long- and short-term adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands, and to avoid direct or indirect support of new construction in wetlands wherever there is a practicable alternative. In accordance with EO 11990 and 32 Code of Federal Regulations § 989, a Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONPA) must accompany the Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) stating why there are no practicable alternatives to development within or affecting wetland areas. The Proposed Actions would result in impacts to wetlands but not floodplains; therefore, the following FONPA is presented with the FONSI, pursuant to EO 11990.

Wetland impacts would be reduced to the maximum extent possible through environmentally protective design features and Best Management Practices (BMPs). Pursuant to Section 404(b)(1) of the Clean Water Act of 1977 (CWA), wetland impacts must be avoided to the greatest extent practicable. The project has been designed, and its alignment situated, to avoid surface waters and minimize impacts to aquatic resources (see Section 2.2, Project Design Features in the EA). Short-term impacts on wetlands and vernal pools within the project area would be expected from culvert construction. Impacts to seasonal wetland habitats (potentially jurisdictional roadside ditches) would result from the installation of six new culverts for new access roads and the replacement of eight culverts on existing roads; this disturbance includes 0.02 acres of permanent impacts and 0.05 acres of temporary impacts (see Section 4.5.1, Vegetation Communities Environmental Consequences in the EA). Channel topography and underlying substrates would not be modified with the installation of horseshoe culverts, and no net loss in drainage would occur. Replacement of the eight existing culverts may improve the drainage at those locations.

Prior to any construction, a Section 404 permit would be submitted to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Sacramento District, to ensure compliance with the CWA as necessary. A Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) would be developed and followed for the duration of the project. During construction and O&M activities, runoff from site improvements could result in a slight increase in turbidity in surface waters within the project area. Potential impacts from an increase in turbidity would be minimized with the implementation of BMPs (e.g., wetting of soils, silt fencing, and detention basins) as well as adherence to erosion and stormwater management practices to contain soil and storm runoff in the project area. In addition, erosion-control BMPs in accordance with the Beale AFB SWPPP would be implemented as needed, including installation of silt fencing and straw wattles, grading during the dry season, compaction of upland spoils (for soil stability), and seeding and mulching areas of exposed soil as determined necessary by the Beale AFB stormwater manager. The project area is outside of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's 0.2 percent annual flood hazard zone. Therefore, implementation of the Proposed Action would have no impact to floodplains or flood zones.

As noted in the EA, there are no practicable alternatives to the Proposed Action that would avoid all impacts or further minimize impacts to wetlands due to the Beale AFB mission requirements, installation layout constraints, and the nature of the proposed project. In addition to the Proposed Action, multiple project sites were evaluated throughout the base using the selection standards identified in the EA. Beale AFB's selection standards during screening of alternatives considered interference with existing Beale AFB infrastructure, the potential for environmental impacts (e.g., known wetlands, flood zones, etc.), transmission line security and the substation's vulnerability to vandalism or damage, existing access to project facilities and limiting need for new roads, land purchases for infrastructure off Beale AFB, and connection points to Beale AFB's existing distribution network. Taking all the environmental, economic, and other pertinent factors into account, pursuant to EO 11990, and considering the submitted information, WAPA finds that there is no practicable alternative to this action and that the proposed action includes all practical measures to minimize any potential harm to the environment.

#### AGENCY CONSULTATIONS

Pursuant to the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA), Beale AFB led consultation efforts with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on potential impacts from the project to threatened and endangered species. Formal ESA consultation was initiated by Beale AFB on November 29, 2019, and concluded on May 7, 2020, with the issuance of a Biological Opinion. Direct impacts to vernal pool crustaceans would be compensated at a 4:1 ratio, resulting in 0.248 acres of mitigation within the existing vernal pool crustacean habitat preservation area on Beale AFB. In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, WAPA conducted consultations with Native American tribes and the State Historic Preservation Office. Consultation was carried out with 13 tribes. The list of tribes was obtained from the Native American Heritage Commission and from Beale AFB. Additional details about the results of tribal consultation can be found in Section 3.6, Cultural and Tribal, and Paleontological Resources Affected Environment of the EA. WAPA also notified the California State Regional Water Quality Control Board regarding potential impacts to state waters, in accordance with the CWA.

#### PUBLIC SCOPING/COMMENTS

The Draft EA was first made available to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals for 32 days, from January 2, 2020 through February 3, 2020. In response to public request, the public comment period was reinitiated for 30 additional days, from March 18, 2020 to April 17, 2020. WAPA and Beale AFB then revised the Draft EA in response to all public comments and released the Revised Draft EA for public review on August 20, 2020. The last public comment period ended on September 21, 2020. Based on the information contained in the EA, WAPA's federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. WAPA has determined that the proposed federal action described above does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the

jurisdiction of NEPA; therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and WAPA is issuing this FONSI. The Final EA is approved concurrently with this FONSI.

#### FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Additional information and copies of the EA and this FONSI are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

Tish Saare, Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist  
Western Area Power Administration  
Sierra Nevada Regional Office  
114 Parkshore Drive  
Folsom, California 95630  
Phone: (916) 847-3608  
Email: [saare@wapa.gov](mailto:saare@wapa.gov)

This FONSI will be sent directly to individuals who previously requested a copy. A notification of availability will be sent to other potentially affected parties. A copy of the Final EA and this FONSI are also available on the following website:

<https://www.wapa.gov/regions/SN/environment/Pages/Beale-WAPA-Interconnection-Project-BWIP.aspx>

For further information on the DOE NEPA process, contact:

Mr. Brian Costner, Director  
Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance, GC-54  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20585  
Phone: (202) 586-9924 or (800) 472-2756

#### DETERMINATION

Based on the information contained in the EA, WAPA's federal action would not result in significant environmental impacts. WAPA has determined that its proposed federal action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA; therefore, preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement is not required, and WAPA is issuing this FONSI.

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Sonja A. Anderson  
Senior Vice President and  
Sierra Nevada Regional Manager  
Western Area Power Administration  
U.S. Department of Energy

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Date