



Department of Energy
Western Area Power Administration
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
P.O. Box 3700
Loveland, CO 80539-3003

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Pronghorn Flats Wind 115-kV Interconnection Project
Southwest Banner and Northwest Kimball Counties, Nebraska, and Southeast Goshen
County, Wyoming**

DOE/EA-2139

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

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: Orion Wind Resources LLC (Orion) submitted an interconnection request to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to interconnect Orion's planned wind energy project in southwest Banner and Northwest Kimball counties, Nebraska, and southeast Goshen County, Wyoming. Orion is the project developer, and Orion or a subsidiary or affiliate would construct and operate the Pronghorn Flats 115-kilovolt (kV) project.

WAPA is a Federal power marketing agency within the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). Under its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (OATT), WAPA needs to consider and respond to Orion's interconnection request. The OATT contains terms for processing requests for the interconnection of generation facilities to WAPA's transmission system. In reviewing interconnection requests, WAPA must ensure that existing reliability and services are not degraded. The OATT provides for transmission and system studies to ensure that system reliability and service to existing customers are not adversely affected by new interconnections. These studies identify system upgrades or additions necessary to accommodate a proposed project and address whether the upgrades or additions are within a project's scope. Under the OATT, WAPA offers interconnection to all eligible customers on a first-come, first-served basis, with a final decision whether to make this offer subject to the system impact studies and an environmental review under The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In accordance with applicable law and regulations, WAPA prepared an Environmental Assessment (EA), entitled *Pronghorn Flats Wind 115-kV Interconnection Project* (DOE/EA-2139).

Orion's facilities are not part of WAPA's Federal action, but the potential indirect impacts/effects associated with Orion's project are presented alongside those of the Federal action in the EA. WAPA's Proposed Action consists of approving the interconnection request, entering into an interconnection agreement, and operating a new switchyard to facilitate and complete the requested physical interconnection. WAPA has no approval authority over Orion's project.

Orion's planned wind energy facility on private lands includes construction of 30 to 48 wind turbines, producing between 2.5 and 4.2 megawatts (MW) each, plus access roads (16 miles new, 22 miles existing), electric collection system, substation, a fiber optics communication system, operations and maintenance (O&M) facilities, three meteorological (met) towers, an approximately 20-mile 115-kV transmission line, a switchyard that serves as the point of interconnection with WAPA's transmission system, and related facilities and equipment. The interconnection agreement would allow the project's 115-kV transmission line to connect and deliver energy produced by the wind energy facility into WAPA's Round Top–Stegall segment of the Stegall-Archer 115-kV Transmission Line for distribution to project customers.

WAPA places a strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potential adverse environmental impacts. Orion has committed to avoiding or minimizing potential environmental effects from their planned wind generation facility through the implementation of best management practices detailed in section 2.2 of the EA. These commitments by Orion shall be part of and implemented through WAPA's interconnection agreement. Additionally, Orion has engaged in discussions with various State and Federal agencies (e.g., Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Wyoming Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Department of Defense), that resulted in the relocation of certain turbines to avoid or minimize potential concerns.

The EA analyzed and disclosed the potential environmental impacts of Orion's planned project to fully inform its interconnection decision. The EA identified no significant impacts resulting from either WAPA's Federal action or Orion's planned project.

The Draft EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on April 7, 2022. The public comment period ended on May 7, 2022. No comments were received during the comment period for the Draft EA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Additional information and copies of the EA and this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

James Wood, Regional Environmental Manager
Western Area Power Administration
Rocky Mountain Region
P.O. Box 3700
Loveland, CO 80539-3003
Phone: (970) 461-7564


Email: jwood@wapa.gov

A copy of the Final EA and this FONSI are also available on the following website:

<https://www.wapa.gov/regions/RM/environment/Pages/environment.aspx>

DETERMINATION: Based on the analysis contained in DOE/EA-2139, WAPA's Federal action of approving the interconnection request, entering into an interconnection agreement, and operating a new switchyard to facilitate and complete the physical interconnection with WAPA's transmission system does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Thus, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and WAPA issues this FONSI. The Final EA is approved concurrent with this FONSI.

Issued at Loveland, Colorado on August 9, 2022.

 Digitally signed by Barton
V. Barnhart
Date: 2022.08.09
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08/09/2022

Barton V. Barnhart
Senior Vice President and
Rocky Mountain Regional Manager
Western Area Power Administration
U.S. Department of Energy

Date