

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY
NEPA DETERMINATION**



RECIPIENT: The Board of Trustees at the University of Illinois

STATE: IL

PROJECT TITLE: Evaluation of Economic, Ecological, and Performance Impacts of Co-Located Pollinator Plantings at Large-Scale Solar Installations

Funding Opportunity Announcement Number	Procurement Instrument Number	NEPA Control Number	CID Number
DE-FOA-0002243	DE-EE0009371	GFO-0009371-003	G09371

Based on my review of the information concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (authorized under DOE Policy 451.1), I have made the following determination:

CX, EA, EIS APPENDIX AND NUMBER:

Description:

A9 Information gathering, analysis, and dissemination

Information gathering (including, but not limited to, literature surveys, inventories, site visits, and audits), data analysis (including, but not limited to, computer modeling), document preparation (including, but not limited to, conceptual design, feasibility studies, and analytical energy supply and demand studies), and information dissemination (including, but not limited to, document publication and distribution, and classroom training and informational programs), but not including site characterization or environmental monitoring. (See also B3.1 of appendix B to this subpart.)

A11 Technical advice and assistance to organizations

Technical advice and planning assistance to international, national, state, and local organizations.

B3.1 Site characterization and environmental monitoring

Site characterization and environmental monitoring (including, but not limited to, siting, construction, modification, operation, and dismantlement and removal or otherwise proper closure (such as of a well) of characterization and monitoring devices, and siting, construction, and associated operation of a small-scale laboratory building or renovation of a room in an existing building for sample analysis). Such activities would be designed in conformance with applicable requirements and use best management practices to limit the potential effects of any resultant ground disturbance. Covered activities include, but are not limited to, site characterization and environmental monitoring under CERCLA and RCRA. (This class of actions excludes activities in aquatic environments. See B3.16 of this appendix for such activities.) Specific activities include, but are not limited to: (a) Geological, geophysical (such as gravity, magnetic, electrical, seismic, radar, and temperature gradient), geochemical, and engineering surveys and mapping, and the establishment of survey marks. Seismic techniques would not include large-scale reflection or refraction testing; (b) Installation and operation of field instruments (such as stream-gauging stations or flow-measuring devices, telemetry systems, geochemical monitoring tools, and geophysical exploration tools); (c) Drilling of wells for sampling or monitoring of groundwater or the vadose (unsaturated) zone, well logging, and installation of water-level recording devices in wells; (d) Aquifer and underground reservoir response testing; (e) Installation and operation of ambient air monitoring equipment; (f) Sampling and characterization of water, soil, rock, or contaminants (such as drilling using truck- or mobile-scale equipment, and modification, use, and plugging of boreholes); (g) Sampling and characterization of water effluents, air emissions, or solid waste streams; (h) Installation and operation of meteorological towers and associated activities (such as assessment of potential wind energy resources); (i) Sampling of flora or fauna; and (j) Archeological, historic, and cultural resource identification in compliance with 36 CFR part 800 and 43 CFR part 7.

Rationale for determination:

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is proposing to provide federal funding to The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois to research co-location of pollinator plantings at solar facilities to assess the photovoltaic (PV) performance impact, economic impact, and ecological benefits of incorporating pollinator plantings at large-scale solar facilities. Deliverables for this award would include a pollinator planting implementation manual, cost-benefit calculator, a native plant selection tool, and a pollinator scorecard in order to distribute findings to other industry experts, with the help of an Industrial Advisory Group (IAG) and a Technical Advisory group (TAG).

Two previous NEPA Determinations (NDs) were completed for Budget Period 1 (BP1) excluding Subtask 4.1 (GFO-0009371-001; CX A9, A11, and B3.1; 05/07/21) and for all BP1 and BP2 activities (GFO-0009371-002; CX A9, A11, and B3.1; 05/13/2022). BP3 was previously restricted because there was not enough information available to conduct a meaningful review. Since the second ND, the recipient has confirmed that no additional test sites would be added, and no new activities would be carried out. This ND applies to all BP3 activities.

BP3 is comprised of eight tasks (Tasks 17-24) and activities would include continuing stakeholder engagement, conducting Year 3 research using previously approved methods at previously approved test sites, performing data analyses, finalization of pollinator planting implementation manual, cost-benefit analyses, finalizing the solar site selection tool, and final publication of results.

The proposed project would not involve the permanent modification of existing/planned facilities or any change in the use, mission, or operation of these facilities. There are no cultural resources, critical habitats, wetlands, or floodplains within the project areas. A migratory bird nesting survey shall be completed if project activities involving ground disturbance occur between March 15 and September 15. If nests or eggs are found, the area would be cordoned off with a proper buffer until nestlings fledge.

NEPA PROVISION

DOE has made a final NEPA determination.

Include the following condition in the financial assistance agreement:

A migratory bird nesting survey shall be completed if project activities involving ground disturbance occur between March 15 and September 15. If nests or eggs are found, the area would be cordoned off with a proper buffer until nestlings fledge.

Notes:

Solar Energy Technologies Office (SETO)
Review completed by Alex Colling on 10/04/2023.

FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATIONS

The proposed action (or the part of the proposal defined in the Rationale above) fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D. To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities; (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

The proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

SIGNATURE OF THIS MEMORANDUM CONSTITUTES A RECORD OF THIS DECISION.

NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:

 Electronically
Signed By: Andrew Montano
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: 10/6/2023

FIELD OFFICE MANAGER DETERMINATION

- Field Office Manager review not required
- Field Office Manager review required

BASED ON MY REVIEW I CONCUR WITH THE DETERMINATION OF THE NCO :

Field Office Manager's Signature: _____
Field Office Manager

Date: _____