



Department of Energy
Western Area Power Administration
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
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**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION**

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

**Weld Solar 150-Megawatt Photovoltaic Facility and
100-Megawatt Battery Energy Storage System Project
North-Central Weld County, Colorado**

DOE/EA-2178

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

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: Weld Solar, LLC (Weld Solar) submitted an interconnection request to Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) to interconnect Weld Solar's planned solar energy project in north-central Weld County to WAPA's existing Ault Substation. Weld Solar is the project developer and would construct and operate the 150-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic solar facility and 100-MW battery energy storage system 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 Weld Solar'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 *Weld Solar Project Draft Environmental Assessment, Weld County, Colorado* (DOE/EA-2178).

Weld Solar's facilities are not part of WAPA's Federal action, but the connected actions associated with Weld Solar'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 the existing Ault Substation to facilitate and complete the requested physical interconnection. WAPA has no approval authority over the other aspects of Weld Solar's project.

Weld Solar's planned solar energy project on private and state lands includes construction of an up to 150-MW capacity solar array, a 100-MW battery energy storage system with a 4-hour storage duration, a 345-kilovolt generation tie-in line approximately 0.2 mile in length, an interconnection switchyard and substation to interconnect with WAPA's transmissions system, approximately 9 miles of access road, and ancillary facilities including inverters, perimeter fencing, and a supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system. The number of photovoltaic panels to be used in the solar array is dependent on the selected manufacturer and size of panels selected. Weld Solar's project is primarily within areas of cultivated cropland and grassland, including native shortgrass prairie and disturbed rangeland. Up to 31 acres of temporary disturbance and 1,218 acres of permanent disturbance would occur as a result of Weld Solar's planned solar energy project. The interconnection agreement would allow the project's 345-kilovolt transmission line to connect and deliver energy produced by the solar energy facility into WAPA's Ault Substation for distribution to project customers.

WAPA places a strong emphasis on avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating potential adverse environmental impacts. Weld Solar has committed to avoiding or minimizing potential environmental effects to resources of the human environment from their planned solar generation and energy storage facility through the implementation of environmental commitments detailed in sections 3.1.2, 3.2.2, 3.3.2, 3.4.2, 3.5.2, 3.7.2, 3.8.2, and 3.9.2 of the EA. The commitments include avoiding or minimizing effects to vegetation, soils, wildlife, air quality, water resources, and cultural and paleontological resources such as known archaeological sites. Weld Solar has also committed to maintaining a plan for the treatment of unanticipated archaeological discoveries that may occur during the project. These commitments by Weld Solar shall be part of and implemented through WAPA's interconnection agreement. Additionally, Weld Solar has engaged in discussions with various local and state agencies (e.g., Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Colorado State Historic Preservation Office, and Weld County).

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

The Draft EA was released for public review and comment on October 3, 2023, on WAPA's website. The public comment period for the draft EA concluded on November 6, 2023, 34 days after the document was posted to the WAPA website. In total, 29 comments from seven parties were received by WAPA during the public comment period. Comments received were specific to the Project purpose, design, and decommissioning plans; impacts from the Project on wildlife, visual resources, soils, vegetation, traffic patterns, and socioeconomic factors including nearby property values; as well as the public input process. The comments received during the public comment period for the Draft EA as well as the responses to these comments from WAPA, including what revisions were made to the Final EA, are provided in Appendix A of the Final 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:

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

<https://www.wapa.gov/about-wapa/regions/rm/rm-environment/doeea-tbd-weld-solar-weld-county-co/>

DETERMINATION: Based on the analysis contained in DOE/EA-2178, 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 February 27, 2024.

Barton V. Barnhart
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Rocky Mountain Regional Manager
Western Area Power Administration
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