

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Wieland Solar Project
Hunt County, Texas

RURAL UTILITIES SERVICE
United States Department of Agriculture

Wieland Solar, LLC

Prepared by:

Engineering and Environmental Staff
Rural Utilities Service

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A. INTRODUCTION

Wieland Solar LLC (Wieland Solar) plans to submit a financing request to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Development's Rural Utilities Service (RUS) to construct the proposed Wieland Solar Project (project) in Hunt County, Texas. RUS is considering this financing request. Prior to taking a federal action (i.e., providing financial assistance), RUS is required to complete an environmental impact analysis in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (U.S.C. 4231 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and RUS's NEPA implementing regulations, Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970).

After completing an independent analysis of an environmental report prepared by Wieland Solar and its consultant, RUS concurred with its scope and content. In accordance with 7 CFR § 1970.102, RUS adopted the report and issued it as the Agency's Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed project. RUS finds that the EA is consistent with federal regulations and meets the standards for an adequate assessment. Wieland Solar published a newspaper notice, announcing the availability of the EA for public review, in accordance with 7 CFR § 1970.102. In addition, RUS considers the proposed Project an undertaking subject to review under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), 16 USC 470(f), and its implementing regulation, "Protection of Historic Properties" (36 CFR Part 800).

B. PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed project is to provide renewable energy to the existing electrical grid and subsequently to residents in the community. Texas residents have expressed interest in procuring clean power from a solar farm; however, rooftop solar is cost prohibitive for most families due to the high upfront cost. The proposed project solves this dilemma by providing solar power from a solar farm located within the community at competitive rates. The Applicant is responding to a regional need for an affordable and reliable supply of electric power at competitive rates.

The proposed project will also have a positive economic impact on the area and would assist the local utility in meeting the demands of its customers. The Proposed Project will also help meet national and state goals to expand the use of renewable energy. Furthermore, the Proposed Project provides the opportunity to lessen consumer consumption of non-renewable energy and improve the environment by reducing impacts of fossil fuel emissions.

RUS has reviewed the applicant's purpose and need for the project and determined that the proposal will meet the present and future needs.

C. ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED

No Action Alternative

Under the No Action Alternative, RUS would not provide financial assistance to Wieland, and/or the proposed project would not be constructed. This alternative would not assist Wieland in providing renewable energy sourced from the project area to meeting increasing demand for electricity and reduce the need for fossil fuels.

Proposed Action Alternative (Preferred Action)

Under the Proposed Action Alternative, RUS would consider providing financial assistance to the Applicant to construct a 12-acre solar farm on portion of a larger, 20-acre property. The Proposed Project will be constructed in approximately 4-6 months and will consist of the installation of a ground-mounted PV system which will generate 2-MW of renewable power.

The Proposed Project would utilize solar modules, mounted on a steel racking system which will be anchored into the ground using driven steel piles, which will minimize the need for extensive ground disturbance. The Proposed Project would be accessed via an existing gravel road east of FM-2101 and the arrays will be secured by a perimeter fence. The Proposed Project’s proximity to the existing utility infrastructure will allow for a simple interconnection consisting of an overhead line running parallel to the access road and arrays to the overhead electrical line alongside FM-2101. It should be noted that interconnection to the grid is not part of the Proposed Action Alternative and will be completed by the local utility. The Proposed Project involves no vegetation clearing and has been designed to avoid floodplains, streams, and wetlands; however, necessary stormwater and erosion controls will be utilized during construction to minimize the potential for runoff and siltation. It is anticipated that the Proposed Project will operate for a minimum of 40 years.

D. SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The analyses in the EA documented that the proposed project would have no adverse effects to land use, important farmland, formally classified lands, floodplains, wetlands, water resources, coastal resources, biological resources, cultural/historic resources, air quality, social impact and environmental justice, noise, transportation, aesthetics, and human health and safety. A summary of anticipated impacts on the human environment is provided below, including any mitigation measures deemed necessary to avoid or minimize impacts, as summarized below.

Resource	Impact Analysis
General Land Use	Land use would change from agricultural land to a renewable energy facility; however, the land use conversion would result in no significant adverse impacts.
Important Farmland	Approximately 12 acres of Farmland of Statewide Importance will be converted to non-agricultural use; however, consultation with the NRCS concluded the Proposed Project falls within the exemption status resulting in no adverse impacts.
Formally Classified Lands	The Proposed Project will not occur within or adjacent to any listed categories defined as Formally Classified Lands therefore resulting in no impacts.
Floodplains	The Proposed Project will not be located in a SFHA and will not result in impacts that would result in any increases to the 100-year or 500-year flood elevation or present barriers to floodway passage.
Wetlands	Wetlands are not present within the Proposed Project Area therefore resulting in no impacts.
Water Resources	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts; however, necessary stormwater and erosion controls will be utilized during construction to minimize the potential for runoff and siltation.

Resource	Impact Analysis
Biological Resources - General Fish, Wildlife and Vegetation	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts due to minimal impervious surfaces being created, lack of clearing of vegetation and limited use of water.
Biological Resources - Listed Threatened and Endangered Species	The Proposed Project will not result in adverse impacts to listed threatened or endangered species based on the lack of suitable habitat and protected species' requirements. Additionally, no designated critical habitat for listed species occurs within the Proposed Project Area nor will any be affected by the Proposed Project.
Biological Resources - Migratory Birds	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts based on the lack of migratory birds expected to utilize or otherwise visit the Proposed Project Area, as well as the lack of suitable nesting and foraging habitat.
Biological Resources - Bald and Golden Eagles	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts based on the lack of suitable habitat for the species.
Biological Resources - Invasive Species	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts due to maintenance and lack of opportunity for establishment of invasive species.
Cultural Resources and Historic Properties	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts as concluded by consultation with the THC.
Air Quality	The Proposed Project would result in temporary impacts during construction but would result in no significant adverse impacts.
Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts to low income or minority populations.
Coastal Resources	Coastal resources are not present within the Proposed Project Area therefore resulting in no impacts.
Noise	The Proposed Project would result in temporary impacts during construction but would result in no significant adverse impacts.
Traffic and Transportation	The Proposed Project would result in temporary impacts during construction but would result in no significant adverse impacts.
Aesthetics	A change in the visual character of the Proposed Project Area would occur; however, the change would not result in a significant adverse impact given the estimated height of the array and lack of public view.
Human Health and Safety	The Proposed Project will not result in significant adverse impacts to human health and safety.

E. PUBLIC AND AGENCY INVOLVEMENT

Local newspaper notices, announcing the availability of the EA and participation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act were published on January 27, 2022, January 29, 2022 and February 1, 2022 in the Herald Banner newspaper. A copy of the EA was available on the RUS project website, <https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>.

The 14-day public review period began on January 27, 2022 and concluded on February 9, 2022. The RUS website included project information in an easily accessible format (e.g., Section 508-compliant portable document format file [PDF]). RUS and the newspaper received no comments from the public.

F. FINDING OF NO NEW SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Based on its EA, RUS has concluded that the proposed project would have no significant effects to the human environment as disclosed in the EA. The proposed project will have no effects on historic properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and no effects to federally listed species or designated critical habitat. The proposed project would not disproportionately affect minority or low-income populations.

In accordance with the NEPA, as amended (42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq.), the CEQ Regulations (40 CFR 1500–1508), and Rural Development’s Environmental Policies and Procedures (7 CFR Part 1970), RUS has determined that the environmental impacts of the proposed project have been adequately addressed and that no significant impacts to the quality of the human environment would result from construction and operation of the proposed project. Any final action by RUS related to the proposed project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant federal and state environmental laws and regulations. Because RUS’s action will not result in new significant impacts to the quality of the human environment, RUS will not prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for its potential federal action associated with the proposed project.

G. RUS LOAN REVIEW AND RIGHT OF ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

This FONSI is not a decision on a loan application and therefore not an approval of the expenditure of federal funds. Issuance of the FONSI and its notices concludes RUS’s environmental review process. The ultimate decision on loan approval depends upon conclusion of this environmental review process in addition to financial and engineering reviews. Issuance of the FONSI and publication of notices will allow for these reviews to proceed. The decision to provide financial assistance also is subject to the availability of loan funds for the designated purpose in RUS’ budget. There are no provisions to appeal this decision (i.e., issuance of a FONSI). Legal challenges to the FONSI may be filed in Federal District Court under the Administrative Procedures Act.

H. APPROVAL

This FONSI is in effect upon signature:

Dated:

Authorized Signature

CHRISTOPHER A. McLean
Assistant Administrator
Electric Programs
Rural Utilities Service

Contact Information

For additional information on this FONSI and EA, go to:

<https://www.rd.usda.gov/resources/environmental-studies/assessments>, or contact Marcus Brundage at marcus.brundage@usda.gov.