

Skeleton Creek Solar and Battery Storage Project

Environmental Impact Statement Q&A Report

APRIL 2021

PREPARED FOR
USDA Rural Utilities Service



Committed to the future of rural communities.

PREPARED BY
SWCA Environmental Consultants

**SKELETON CREEK SOLAR AND BATTERY STORAGE
PROJECT
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
Q&A REPORT**

Prepared for

USDA Rural Utilities Service

Prepared by

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1 INTRODUCTION

This report provides a summary of the question and answer (Q&A) portions of the virtual public scoping meeting for the Skeleton Creek Solar and Battery Storage Project (the Project) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). As part of the scoping period for the Draft EIS and in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 process pursuant to 36 CFR 800 and the National Historic Preservation Act, on March 30, 2021, the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) held one virtual public scoping meeting for the Project. The purpose of the scoping meeting was to 1) educate the public about the Project; 2) help the public understand the NEPA process and involve the public pursuant to 36 CFR 800.2(d) and 36 CFR 800.8(c)(1)(iv); and 3) explain how to provide scoping comments for the EIS.

The Q&A portions of the virtual public scoping meeting allowed participants to ask questions about the NEPA process and/or the Project. However, questions asked during the virtual public scoping meeting will not be entered in the Project record as a formal comment. Public comments can be submitted through the Project email (SkeletonCreekSolarPublicComments@usda.gov). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hard copies of mail will not be collected. Scoping comments collected will be summarized in the scoping report and used to inform the analysis of the Project in the Draft EIS.

2 QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This section summarizes the questions received and answers provided during the public scoping meeting. During the public scoping meeting, members of the public could submit questions in the following ways:

- Members of the public could use the Raise Hand feature in the webinar to ask a question orally to be answered during the meeting.
- Members of the public could use the Q&A feature in the webinar to submit a question in writing to be answered during the meeting.

RUS received a total of 15 questions from the public during the scoping meeting. All Q&As are summarized in the sections below, by topic. The reader is also referred to the meeting transcript for unedited questions and responses that were captured as part of the meeting recording. Note that several Q&As were not recorded but are provided in this report.

2.1 Meeting Format

Q-1: Did you say there was a link for the intro that we missed earlier?

A-1: Yes, the background information about this Project (including slides presented earlier) is available at the following website: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/environmentalstudy/skeleton-creek-solar-and-battery-storage-project-garfield-county-oklahoma>.

Q-2: I have a coworker that wants to join the meeting. Can he still register to join?

A-2: Yes, he can still register now, from the website at: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/environmentalstudy/skeleton-creek-solar-and-battery-storage-project-garfield-county-oklahoma>.

Q-3: Will I still have access to these documents after the meeting?

A-3: Yes, these will be available following the meeting indefinitely.

Q-4: How many folks are on the call, if you don't mind me asking?

A-4: There are two people in the meeting right now.

2.2 National Environmental Policy Act

Q-1: Will you be tiering to or incorporating by reference any portion of the March 2020 Bureau of Land Management Land Use Plan/Resource Management Plan for the Oklahoma, Kansas, and Texas planning/decisions area or using the U.S. Geological Survey-developed Rapid Ecoregional Assessment for the Southern Great Plains?

A-1: At this point in time, we have not begun any analysis for the EIS for the Project. We will make note of these planning documents and review them as a part of the scoping and analysis process to see what information may be applicable for RUS to incorporate or tier to in our EIS.

2.3 Project Description

Q-0: Not a question. Could you please provide me the legal land description of the Project Area? prich@blm.gov.

A-0. This information was provided to Mr. Rich after the meeting through his official government email. NOTE: General location maps are available to the public in the AES/SSS document and the presentation materials on the RUS website.

Q-1: When is this Project likely to start?

A-1: Construction would begin summer 2022 (assuming all permitting is complete) and operations would begin in 2023.

Q-2: Is it possible that the Project could start sooner than 2022? That seems quite far from today. What happens between now and then?

A-2: Preparation of the EIS is scheduled to occur between the Notice of Intent publication date of March 2021 and May 2022. Preparation of an EIS is a lengthy process that takes many steps, so completion by May 2022 represents a very aggressive schedule. Additionally, NextEra will need to obtain any other required authorizations or approvals during this period.

Q-3: At what point will you secure the solar modules? Or have they already been purchased?

A-3: This question was deferred to a response after the meeting. The follow-up response was that NextEra is in the process of procuring solar modules right now and hopes to have them secured by the end of the year.

Q-4: How many acres will this farm cover?

A-4: At this point in time, the exact design has not been finalized, but the application area is over 12,000 acres. There are four alternatives ranging in size from approximately 4,000 to 6,000 acres, which cover the entire developed Project Area and not only the solar panel areas.

Q-5: What is the address for the farm?

A-5: The Project is located on private land, so RUS will not be giving out the address. However, there are maps available on the Project website and in the PowerPoint for the meeting, which provide an overview of the Project location.

2.4 Resource-Specific Questions

Q-1: Does the Project Area overlay any federal or Indian Trust mineral estate?

A-1: The Project does not overlay any federal land or any Indian Trust minerals estate that we are aware of.

Q-2: ODOT has a bridge project slated for construction in FY25 on Fox Drive just west of South 54th on Skeleton Creek. Do you anticipate any transmission lines in that area or any other obstacles that could interfere with bridge construction?

A-2: We are not aware of that specific location, but believe that Fox Drive is a little bit more north going east-west than where the Project is currently located. At this point, we do not believe the bridge construction would interfere with transmission line construction. In terms of equipment delivery for the construction of the Project, NextEra would work with ODOT to understand where their projects are and where our trucks or other hauling vehicles would travel around the Project site.

Q-3: Have any estimates for impacts to waters of the U.S. been calculated?

A-3: NextEra is currently working on the layout and design of the Project, so impacts to waters of the U.S. have not been calculated yet. There will be some follow-up surveys and then these calculations will be developed. There will be coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on any anticipated impacts. Right now, the Project is being sited such that the solar panels would avoid any aquatic features. Any potential impacts would be the result of access roads, underground collection lines, or transmission line locations that may cross over or underneath the aquatic features.

Q-4: What type of environmental concern is there with solar?

A-4: RUS prepares an EIS to analyze the impacts of all projects—including infrastructure or solar projects—that fall under their purview as lead federal agency. As part of that EIS, RUS looks at many different resources, such as air quality issues or migratory bird impacts. RUS also looks at ways to mitigate impacts that can come about with the construction of that project.

3 ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information please visit: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/environmentalstudy/skeleton-creek-solar-and-battery-storage-project-garfield-county-oklahoma>.

To submit a public comment please email: SkeletonCreekSolarPublicComments@usda.gov

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hard copies of mail will not be collected.

The scoping comment period closes on April 19, 2021.