



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

Rebecca Cameron Valcq, Chairperson
Ellen Nowak, Commissioner
Tyler Huebner, Commissioner

4822 Madison Yards Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

August 6, 2020

Re: Application for Certificate of Public Convenience and
Necessity of Wood County Solar Project, LLC to Construct
a Solar Electric Generation Facility Transmission Tie Line
in the Town of Saratoga, Wood County, Wisconsin

9803-CE-101

To the Person Addressed:

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) received an application from Wood County Solar Project, LLC (Wood County or applicant) for the construction of an electric tie line to connect a new solar facility to the existing transmission grid. The Commission also received an application from Wood County to construct the new solar electric generation facility and associated facilities. The proposed project would be located in the town of Saratoga in Wood County WI. The Commission is sending this letter to property owners directly along the proposed routes of the tie line or near the proposed solar facility site, as well as individuals who have asked to be placed on our mailing list. It is also being sent to public officials who may wish to place this notification in a location where it can be viewed by the public.

This is a Type II action under Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.10(2). It requires the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) to determine if an environmental impact statement (EIS) is necessary under Wis. Stat. § 1.11. Commission staff from the Division of Digital Access, Consumer and Environmental Affairs completed an environmental review of the proposed project routes and prepared an EA to determine if an EIS is necessary. A notification of the Commission's intent to prepare an EA, including a solicitation for comments on the environmental aspects of this project, was mailed to landowners, local and regional media, affected municipal entities, the regional planning commission, and area legislators along the proposed routes on April 22, 2020.

The preliminary determination indicates that no significant impacts on the human or natural environment are likely to occur as a result of the construction and operation of this project for either of the routes under consideration. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required. Comments regarding this determination can be directed to the contact person listed at the end of this letter. The remainder of this letter describes the primary impacts of the route options and summarizes the conclusions of the EA. To obtain a copy of the EA, please request a copy from the contact person listed at the end of this letter.

Proposed Project

The applicant proposes construction of a 150 megawatts solar generation facility. The project would require construction of an approximately 4-mile long new 138-kilovolt (kV) electric

transmission line, called the *generation tie line* (or *gen-tie line*). The purpose of the gen-tie line is to transport the electricity generated by the new solar generation facility to the existing electric transmission infrastructure. The proposed generation tie line would be required to connect the solar generation facilities to the transmission grid on the existing American Transmission Company LLC (ATC)-owned Port Edwards to Sand Lake 138 kV transmission line (ATC X-11). The applicant estimates the total cost for the new generation tie line would be between \$3.0-4.2 million for Route 1 and \$3.0-5.1 million for Route 2.

The proposed generation tie line would use two steel monopole structure designs that are typically 70 to 80 feet above ground height in addition to some taller structures to cross existing transmission lines or other constraints. No structures are anticipated to exceed 100 feet above ground height. Span lengths would be 400 to 600 feet. Preliminary foundation designs use a direct embed with rock backfill as well as the use of concrete caisson foundations.

The applicant proposed two potential routes for the generation tie line to connect the solar generation facility with the interconnection point on ATC X-11, Route 1 and Route 2. Both routes would primarily use new ROW with a width of 100 feet. Route 1 would comprise of 47.0 acres of ROW. Route 2 would comprise of 52.4 total acres of ROW. Portions of Route 1 and Route 2 would share road right-of-way (ROW) with Mill Avenue. Both routes would share a common path for about 2 miles. Route 1 would be 3.9 total miles long and parallel either existing transmission line or road ROW for roughly 85% of its length. Route 2 would be 4.3 miles long and parallel approximately 2 miles of existing transmission line (approximately 47% of its length), then separate from Route 1 heading east into land owned by the applicant.

Landscapes for both Route 1 and Route 2 would be mostly flat with gradual topographic changes and gentle slopes. The area contains surface waters and wetlands, and both routes would cross Sevenmile Creek. Land cover would be primarily upland woodland with some grassland and developed areas. Native vegetation is oak, pine, and aspen forests with tamarack/black spruce forests and bottomland hardwoods in wet areas, however this area is now mostly comprised of red pine plantations. Lower-lying areas were mostly formerly wetland before they were drained for agricultural purposes.

Potential Natural Resource and Social Impacts

Most of the project impacts during construction would be temporary, such as increased traffic, noise, and air pollution. After construction, the project would have relatively minor impacts to the surrounding environment. However, the project would permanently affect the current land use and aesthetics of the area, as well as several animal and plant species.

During construction activities, there would be increased noise, dust and vibration in the construction areas. There would be increased traffic in the project area as employees and

deliveries arrive at and leave the project work areas. Loose or disturbed soils could be susceptible to erosion. The applicant provided a vegetation management plan that would address erosion and storm water risks, as well as provide information on restoration activities.

Animals and plants would be displaced or damaged as a result of the project. The applicant completed a certified endangered resources (ER) review with Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) for the proposed project area. The ER review identified measures that the applicant would be required to perform to mitigate impacts to protected species. Since the project would begin construction over a year from the ER review date, Commission staff will recommend that the applicant be required to conduct an updated review closer to the construction start date to determine if any additional actions should be required to avoid impacts to protected species. Commission staff will also suggest that the applicant be required to implement WDNR's recommended actions to protect one special concern plant species that may have suitable habitat present along the route. Wetland fill is proposed for both Route 1 and Route 2. Along either route, one pole structure would be placed in wetland, resulting in 64 sq. ft. of permanent wetland fill.

Snowmobile and ATV/UTV trail users may experience short-term impacts during construction. A snowmobile trail managed by a local snowmobile club would cross both routes along Segment A and parallel the north side of Segment B near, but outside of, the ROW. Several Wood County ATV/UTV routes occur along roads in the project area. Route 1 would cross an ATV/UTV route along Branding Iron Court (Segment D) and then cross and parallel a route along Mill Ave. (Segments E and G). Route 2 would cross an ATV/UTV route along Segment F at Mill Avenue and then parallel the route for a short distance along Segment G near the switching station. If construction occurs during the winter, snowmobile trail users may need to be re-routed where the trail intersects or occurs near the routes. The ATV/UTV routes are located on local roads and impacts during construction may include slower traffic zones and/or minor reroutes. No long-term impacts are anticipated for the snowmobile trail or ATV/UTV routes.

Conclusion

No significant environmental effects are expected to result from the proposed project along either of the potential routes as described with stated construction methods and mitigation plans. No significant impacts on the human environment that would warrant the preparation of an EIS are expected if this project is constructed along either of the route alternatives. Thus, preparation of an EIS, as described in Wis. Stat. § 1.11, is not required for this project.

Copies of the EA are available upon request, either in electronic or paper format (for a paper copy, an address must be provided). Requests for a copy of the EA should be made to Adam Ingwell at the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin by telephone at (608) 267-9197, by

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e-mail at adam.ingwell@wisconsin.gov, or by regular mail directed to the Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 7854, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7854.

Comments on the finding of no significant impact for this proposed project should be made to Adam Ingwell at the address above, by email, or through the Commission's web comment form. Go to the Commission's web site at <http://psc.wi.gov> , click on "File a Comment" button. On the next page, select the "File a comment" link that appears for docket number 9803-CE-101.

All comments must be received by Friday, August 21, 2019.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Adam Ingwell", written in a cursive style.

Adam Ingwell
Environmental Affairs Coordinator – Supervisor
Division of Digital Access, Consumer and Environmental Affairs

AI:kle DL:01758187

Attachment

