

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
NECO (HAXTUN) WIND ENERGY PROJECT
LOGAN AND PHILLIPS COUNTIES, COLORADO
DOE/EA-1812

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

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: Western Area Power Administration (Western) is a power marketing administration in the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE). The DOE Golden Field Office (Golden Field Office) provided Federal funding appropriated under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to Phillips County under the Community Renewable Energy Development Program (CRED). Phillips County proposes to use \$2.55 million in CRED funding to facilitate and partially fund the design, permitting, and construction of the Haxtun Wind Project (now called the NECO Wind Project). The proposed project is an approximately 30-megawatt wind energy project and would be located in Phillips and Logan counties in northeastern Colorado. Golden Field Office's proposed action is to authorize the expenditure of Federal funding under CRED for the proposed project. That action was analyzed in an Environmental Assessment (EA) entitled *Final Environmental Assessment for the Haxtun Wind Energy Project, Logan and Phillips Counties, Colorado (Final EA, DOE/EA-1812)*. The Golden Field Office issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) in January 2012. Western proposes to approve an interconnection request from the NECO Wind Project. Western's purpose and need is to approve or deny the interconnection request in accordance with its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff and the Federal Power Act, as amended. Approval of the request would require that Western expand the existing Haxtun Substation near Haxtun, Colorado. Western considered the EA, FONSI, and Supplement Analysis (described below) in its decision on the interconnection request and Haxtun Substation expansion.

The introduction of the EA explains that at the beginning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review for the NECO Wind Project, Western was considering a request for interconnection with its Haxtun Substation submitted by NECO. NECO later decided to request a connection from Highline Electric Association and withdrew its request to interconnect with Western. After the withdrawal of the interconnection request, Western had no decision to make regarding the NECO Wind Project and did not issue a decision based on the EA. After Golden Field Office issued a FONSI, NECO submitted another request for interconnection to Western. Western needs to respond to the request. Western must consider the environmental effects of NECO's Project and the required expansion of the Haxtun Substation by approximately 2.76 acres.

NECO modified its project after the EA and FONSI were completed. Western needs to consider the potential effects of the Haxtun Substation expansion, which was not addressed in detail in the EA. Western and Golden Field Office prepared a Supplement Analysis that covers the proposed expansion of the Haxtun Substation and the additional modifications to the NECO Wind Project. The Supplement Analysis demonstrated that the expansion of the Haxtun Substation and other modification to the NECO Wind Project did not result in effects that were substantially different from those discussed in the EA. Western considered the analysis in the EA, the Golden Field Office FONSI, and the Supplement Analysis and incorporates them by reference. These documents and other supporting information are available at http://www.eere.energy.gov/golden/NEPA_FEA_FONSI.aspx and at the DOE NEPA Web site at <http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/ea-1812-final-environmental-assessment>. Western addresses its decision on the Interconnection Request from NECO and the expansion of the Haxtun Substation in this FONSI.

Western prepared this FONSI in accordance with NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing NEPA, as amended (40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508), and DOE NEPA regulations (10 CFR Part 1021).

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The Final EA and Supplement Analysis, examined the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and a No-Action Alternative, and the NECO Wind Project. Under the No-Action Alternative, which is no action for DOE, including both the Golden Field Office and Western, DOE assumes for purposes of the EA that the NECO Wind Project would not proceed without CRED funding and the approval of the Interconnection Request.

Based on the information in the Final EA, FONSI, and the Supplement Analysis Western concludes the proposed project would not impact the following resources: air quality, paleontology, groundwater, streams, wetlands and floodplains, land use, aviation, environmental justice, and intentional destructive acts.

The FONSI issued by Golden Field Office addressed the following resources in more detail as part of its analysis: geology and soils, cultural resources, biological resources, socioeconomics, aesthetics and visual resources, roads, recreation, and communications interference, public health and safety, noise, and shadow flicker. Western reviewed the discussion in the FONSI and agrees with the evaluations. For more information, the reader is referred to the FONSI issued by Golden Field Office.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE EA PROCESS: In accordance with applicable regulations and policies, DOE sent scoping letters to potentially interested local, State, and Federal agencies, including the Governor of Colorado, the Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Colorado Historical Society (SHPO), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CDOW), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and to representatives

of the Arapahoe, Ute, Southern Ute, and Cheyenne Native American Tribes. DOE also sent scoping letters to other potentially interested individuals, potentially affected landowners, and organizations to solicit public comment, published the scoping letter on Golden Field Office's Electronic Public Reading Room, and advertised the scoping comment period in the Haxtun Fleming Herald on May 12 and May 19, 2010. The scoping information described the Golden Field Office Proposed Action and requested assistance in identifying potential issues to be evaluated in the EA.

In response to the scoping letter, DOE received three comments. Those comments, which are included in Appendix A of the Final EA, were from the SHPO, the USFWS, and the CDOW. For each comment, DOE and NECO Wind have followed the guidance provided.

DOE conducted a public scoping meeting on May 27, 2010, and 41 members of the public attended to discuss the proposed project. Western attended this meeting. Meeting notification was sent to over 1,000 interested parties and a meeting notice was published in the Haxtun Fleming Herald. Nine oral comments and three written comments were received.

A Notice of Availability for the Draft EA was placed in the Haxtun Fleming Herald on October 19, 2011. A postcard of the Notice of Availability was mailed to Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies, and to special interest groups and members of the general public who previously had requested notification or expressed interest in the proposed project. The Notice informed recipients that the Draft EA was available and that DOE would accept comments until November 3, 2011.

DOE received two comment documents during the public comment period. Comment documents included an e-mail from the USFWS and an anonymous letter. The Final EA summarized the comments and, as appropriate, included specific DOE responses or modifications to Draft EA text.

DOE issued the final EA in January 2012 and FONSI on January 4, 2012. A Supplement Analysis was completed on October 10, 2013, and posted on the Golden Field Office Web site at the address given above.

DETERMINATION: Based on the information presented in the Final EA (DOE/EA -1812), the FONSI issued by Golden Field Office and the Supplement Analysis, Western determined that approving the Interconnection of the NECO Wind Project at the Haxtun Substation, and the expansion of the Haxtun Substation to accommodate electrical equipment needed for the interconnection, do not constitute a major Federal action that significantly affects the quality of the human environment in the context of NEPA. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this FONSI.

For questions about this FONSI, contact:

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