

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION
POWER PURCHASE AGREEMENT FOR
PART 2 OF THE MESQUITE SOLAR ENERGY PROJECT
IN MARICOPA COUNTY, ARIZONA

AGENCY: Western Area Power Administration

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: In 2010 and 2011, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) conducted an environmental assessment (EA) (DOE/EA-1796) to analyze the potential environmental impacts associated with issuing a Federal loan guarantee to Sempra Generation (Sempra) for construction of a 400-megawatt (MW) photovoltaic solar power project and associated interconnection transmission line at the 3,760 acre Mesquite Solar Energy Facility (Mesquite Solar) in Maricopa County, Arizona. DOE subsequently issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) on February 17, 2011. Sempra constructed Part 1 of Mesquite Solar on about 1,530 acres in 2011-2012 and 150 MW of production capacity came online in late 2012.

On September 29, 2014, Western Area Power Administration (Western) entered into an Interagency Agreement with the U.S. Department of the Navy (Navy) to assist in the purchase of renewable energy to support Federal renewable goals and mandates. In response to Western's Request for Proposal issued on September 30, 2014, Sempra proposed to construct generation of up to 150 MW of power on about 980 acres of Part 2 of Mesquite Solar. Pursuant to DOE regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 10 CFR 1021.314, Western conducted a supplement analysis process on the proposed construction of Part 2 of Mesquite Solar as originally analyzed in DOE/EA-1796, which is incorporated here by reference. Western's NEPA analysis will help determine whether to enter into a Power Purchase Agreement with Sempra and/or its affiliates to purchase, on behalf of the Navy, the renewable energy that would be generated by Part 2 of Mesquite Solar.

All discussion and analysis related to the potential impacts of construction and operation of the Mesquite Solar project is contained in DOE/EA-1796. DOE examined potential impacts to the following resources and found none to be significant: land use; visual resources; air quality; noise; geology and soils; water resources including floodplains; biological resources; cultural resources; socioeconomics and environmental justice; public health and safety including impacts related to intentional destructive acts; transportation; and cumulative effects including global climate change. In conducting a supplement analysis process of Part 2 of Mesquite Solar, Western has determined that there are no significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns resulting from the project or its impacts, and a Supplemental EA is therefore not required.

Western identified minor changes to some resources and project design since the 2011 FONSI was issued. The Sonoran desert tortoise (*Gopherus morafkai*, formerly *Gopherus agassizii*), identified in the EA as an Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) species of concern with little potential of occurrence in the project area is now listed as a candidate species by the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The tortoise still has little potential to occur in the project area. The Sprague's Pipit (*Anthus spragueii*) was not listed in the EA as having potential to occur within the project area but has since been listed as an AZGFD species of concern and FWS candidate species, though it has little potential to occur in the project area based on habitat requirements. In addition, the project occurs within the FWS-listed Sonoran pronghorn (*Antilocarpa americana sonoriensis*) experimental non-essential population area listed in May 2011. However, pronghorns are not known to occur in the project area and both the fencing around the project area and human presence constitute a deterrent to pronghorn inhabitation.

On the project design, the collector lines identified in the EA as below-ground will be single-pole and located above-ground at least one mile south of Elliot Road. The distance from the road and use of local topography in placing the poles will minimize visual concerns. Some transformers in Part 2 of Mesquite Solar will be skid-based and have built-in secondary containment of sufficient volume rather than permanent concrete or metal containment required for stationary transformers per the EA. The Floodplain Statement of Findings issued with the 2011 FONSI is incorporated by reference.

Western conducted consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and received concurrence on March 6, 2015, that no historic properties would be affected. This supplements the SHPO's original concurrence on September 8, 2010. Western also conducted consultation with the five Tribes contacted during the EA. On April 7, 2015, four tribes concurred that no historic properties would be affected. One tribe did not respond.

DETERMINATION: On the basis of the Final EA and the FONSI published in 2011, as well as the findings of the supplement analysis process, Western has determined that the construction of Part 2 of the Mesquite Solar Energy Facility in Maricopa County, Arizona, will not have a significant effect on the human environment. The preparation of an environmental impact statement is therefore not required, and Western is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact.

Copies of the Final EA and 2011 FONSI are available at the DOE website at <http://energy.gov/nepa/downloads/ea-1796-final-environmental-assessment>. Additional information, including the Final EA and FONSI, as well as this FONSI, are available from:

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Additional information on the DOE NEPA process is available from:

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