

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR**Fish and Wildlife Service**

[FWS–R3–ES–2021–0042;
FXES11140300000–212]

Draft Environmental Assessment and Proposed Habitat Conservation Plan; Receipt of an Application for an Incidental Take Permit, California Ridge Wind Farm, Champaign and Vermilion Counties, Illinois

AGENCY: Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability of documents; request for comment and information.

SUMMARY: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have received an application from California Ridge Wind Energy, LLC (applicant), for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), for its California Ridge Wind Farm (project). If approved, the ITP would authorize the incidental take of four bat species. The applicant has prepared a habitat conservation plan, which is also available for review. We also announce the availability of a draft environmental assessment, which has been prepared in response to the permit application in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. We request public comment on the application and associated documents.

DATES: We will accept comments received or postmarked on or before July 6, 2021.

ADDRESSES:

Document availability: Electronic copies of the documents this notice announces, along with public comments received, will be available online in Docket No. FWS–R3–ES–2021–0042 at <http://www.regulations.gov>.

Comment submission: In your comment, please specify whether your comment addresses the proposed HCP, draft EA, or any combination of the aforementioned documents, or other supporting documents. You may submit written comments by one of the following methods:

- *Online:* <http://www.regulations.gov>. Search for and submit comments on Docket No. FWS–R3–ES–2021–0042.

- *By hard copy:* Submit comments by U.S. mail to Public Comments Processing, Attn: Docket No. FWS–R3–ES–2021–0042; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 5275 Leesburg Pike, MS: PRB/3W, Falls Church, VA 22041–3803.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Kraig McPeck, Field Supervisor, Illinois-Iowa Ecological Services Field

Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1511 47th Ave., Moline, IL 61265; telephone: 309–757–5800, extension 202; or Andrew Horton, Regional HCP Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—Interior Region 3, 5600 American Blvd., West, Suite 990, Bloomington, MN 55437–1458; telephone: 612–713–5337.

Individuals who are hearing impaired or speech impaired may call the Federal Relay Service at 1–800–877–8339 for TTY assistance.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: We, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, have received an application from California Ridge Wind Energy, LLC (applicant), for an incidental take permit (ITP) under the Endangered Species Act, as amended (ESA; 16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*), for its California Ridge Wind Farm (project). If approved, the ITP would be for a 20-year period and would authorize the incidental take of the following four species: Indiana bat (federally listed as endangered), northern long-eared bat (federally listed as threatened), little brown bat (currently under discretionary review), and tricolored bat (petitioned for listing under ESA). The applicant has prepared a habitat conservation plan that describes the actions and measures that the applicant would implement to avoid, minimize, and mitigate incidental take of the four species. We also announce the availability of a draft environmental assessment (EA), which has been prepared in response to the permit application in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. We request public comment on the application and associated documents.

Background

Section 9 of the ESA and its implementing regulations prohibit the “take” of animal species listed as endangered or threatened. “Take” is defined under the ESA as to “harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect” listed animal species, “or to attempt to engage in any such conduct” (16 U.S.C. 1538). However, under section 10(a) of the ESA, we may issue permits to authorize incidental take of listed species. “Incidental take” is defined by the ESA as take that is incidental to, and not the purpose of, carrying out an otherwise lawful activity. Regulations governing incidental take permits for endangered and threatened species, respectively, are found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 50 CFR 17.22 and 50 CFR 17.32.

Applicant’s Proposed Project

The applicant requests a 20-year ITP to take the federally endangered Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*), threatened northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*), non-listed little brown bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), and non-listed tricolored bat (*Perimyotis subflavus*) (covered species). The applicant determined that take is reasonably certain to occur incidental to operation of 134 previously constructed wind turbines that have a total generating capacity of 214.4 megawatts and covering approximately 35,270 acres of private land. The proposed conservation strategy in the applicant’s proposed HCP is designed to avoid, minimize, and mitigate the impacts of the covered activity on the covered species. The biological goals and objectives are to increase the understanding of the risk to covered species populations resulting from operation of wind energy facilities; minimize mortality of the covered species as a result of wind farm operations in the permit area; and to support survival and recovery of the covered species by maintaining or increasing the reproductive capacity of the populations of the covered species. The HCP provides on-site avoidance and minimization measures, which include turbine operational adjustments. The authorized level of take from the project is up to a total of 100 Indiana bats, 280 northern long-eared bats, 780 little brown bats, and 240 tricolored bats over the 20-year project duration. To offset the impacts of the taking of covered species, the applicant proposes to restore and protect up to 563.2 acres of suitable habitat for the covered species and up to 13 artificial bat roost structures. Mitigation will occur in the same or immediately adjacent watershed as the project.

National Environmental Policy Act

The issuance of an ITP is a Federal action that triggers the need for compliance with NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*). We prepared a draft EA that analyzes the environmental impacts on the human environment resulting from three alternatives: A no-action alternative, the proposed action, and a more restrictive alternative consisting of feathering turbines at a wind speed that results in less impacts to bats.

Next Steps

The Service will evaluate the permit application and the comments received to determine whether the application meets the requirements of section 10(a) of the ESA. We will also conduct an

intra-Service consultation pursuant to section 7 of the ESA to evaluate the effects of the proposed take. After considering the above findings, we will determine whether the permit issuance criteria of section 10(a)(1)(B) of the ESA have been met. If met, the Service will issue the requested ITP to the applicant.

Public Comments

The Service invites comments and suggestions from all interested parties during a 30-day public comment period (see **DATES**). In particular, information and comments regarding the following topics are requested:

1. The environmental effects that implementation of any alternative could have on the human environment;

2. Whether or not the significance of the impact on various aspects of the human environment has been adequately analyzed; and

3. Any threats to the Indiana bat and the northern long-eared bat that may influence their populations over the life of the ITP that are not addressed in the proposed HCP; and

4. Any other information pertinent to evaluating the effects of the proposed action on the human environment.

You may submit comments by one of the methods shown under **ADDRESSES**. We will post on <http://regulations.gov> all public comments and information received electronically or via hardcopy. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the administrative record associated with this action. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request in your comment that we withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be made available for public disclosure in their entirety.

Authority

We provide this notice under section 10(c) of the ESA (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*) and its implementing regulations (50 CFR 17.22) and the NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4371 *et seq.*) and its implementing

regulations (40 CFR 1506.6; 43 CFR part 46).

Lori Nordstrom,

Assistant Regional Director, Ecological Services.

[FR Doc. 2021–11602 Filed 6–2–21; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4333–15–P

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Indian Affairs

**[212A2100DD AAK6006201
AOR3030.999900]**

Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Proposed Southern Bighorn Solar Projects, Clark County, Nevada

AGENCY: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: This notice advises the public that the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as the lead Federal agency, with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians (Moapa Band) as cooperating agencies, intends to file a final environmental impact statement (FEIS) with the EPA for the proposed Southern Bighorn Solar Projects (SBSPs or Project). The FEIS evaluates photovoltaic (PV) solar energy generation and storage projects on the Moapa River Indian Reservation (Reservation) and collector lines along with the use of existing access roads and an existing generation interconnection (gen-tie) line located on the Reservation, Reservation lands managed by BLM, and BLM lands. This notice also announces that the FEIS is now available for public review.

DATES: To be fully considered, written comments on the FEIS must arrive no later than 30 days after EPA publishes its Notice of Availability in the **Federal Register**.

ADDRESSES: The FEIS is available at the following website:

www.southernbighornsolar.com/. You may mail, email, hand carry or telefax written comments to Mr. Chip Lewis, Regional Environmental Protection Officer, BIA Western Regional Office, Branch of Environmental Quality Services, 2600 North Central Avenue, 4th Floor, Mail Room, Phoenix, Arizona 85004–3008; fax (602) 379–3833; email: chip.lewis@bia.gov.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. Chip Lewis, BIA Western Regional Office, Branch of Environmental Quality

Services at (602) 379–6750 or Mr. Garry Cantley at (602) 379–6750.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Federal action, taken under 25 U.S.C. 415, is the BIA's approval of two solar energy ground leases and associated agreements entered into by the Moapa Band with 300MS 8me LLC and 425LM 8me LLC (Applicants). The agreements provide for construction, operation and maintenance (O&M), and eventual decommissioning of the PV electricity generation and battery storage facilities located entirely on the Reservation and specifically on lands held in trust for the Moapa Band, in Clark County Nevada.

The PV electricity generation and battery storage facilities would be located on up to 3,600 acres of tribal trust land (2,600 acres for SBSP I and 1,000 acres for SBSP II) and would have a combined capacity of up to 400 megawatts alternating current (MWac)—300 MWac for SBSP I, and 100 MWac for SBSP II. The two solar Projects include the solar fields, access roads, collector lines, and connection with an existing transmission gen-tie line.

Construction of the 300MWac project is expected to take approximately 14–16 months, and construction of the up to 100MWac project is expected to take approximately 8–10 months. The two projects may be constructed simultaneously or sequentially. The electricity generation and storage facilities are expected to be operated for up to 50 years under the terms of the leases, with time for construction and decommissioning. Major onsite facilities include multiple blocks of solar PV panels mounted on fixed tilt or tracking systems, pad mounted inverters and transformers, collector lines, up to 1,000 MW-hours of battery storage, access roads, and O&M facilities. Water will be needed during construction for dust control; a minimal amount will be needed during operations for administrative and sanitary use and for panel washing. The water supply required for the Projects would be leased from the Moapa Band. Access to the SBSPs will be provided via North Las Vegas Boulevard from the I–15/US 93 interchange.

The purposes of the proposed Project are, among other things, to: (1) Provide a long-term, diverse, and viable economic revenue base and job opportunities for the Moapa Band; (2) assist Nevada to meet their State renewable energy needs; and (3) allow the Moapa Band, in partnership with the Applicant, to optimize the use of the lease site while maximizing the