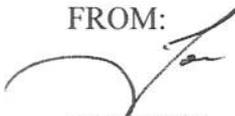




United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Washington, D.C. 20240
<http://www.blm.gov>

DECISION MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY

FROM:  Robert Abbey
Director, Bureau of Land Management

SUBJECT:  Decision Record – Centinela Solar Energy Project located on private land with an associated BLM connected action right-of-way (ROW)

INTRODUCTION

Centinela Solar Energy, LLC, (Centinela) plans to construct a 275 megawatt (MW) photovoltaic (PV) solar energy project on approximately 2,067 acres of privately owned, previously disturbed agricultural land. The site is approximately 8 miles southwest of the City of El Centro in Imperial County, California, just north of the United States/Mexico international border. To facilitate the project on private land, Centinela submitted a right-of-way application to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to construct and operate a 230 kilovolt (kV) electrical generation line across BLM land connecting the proposed solar energy project to the Imperial Valley Substation.

BACKGROUND

The key components of the electrical generating facility on privately owned land are the PV arrays, the project substation, the common services area, and ancillary systems (fencing, security, fire protection, access roads, and other systems). The project will require about 18 acre-feet of water per year for panel washing, a fraction of previous agricultural water use.

Under the BLM ROW grant, Centinela would be allowed the right to use, occupy and develop a 230 kilovolt (kV) electrical generation line across BLM land. The transmission line would traverse 1.2 miles within a 125 foot-wide ROW, totaling about 19 acres, within an existing designated utility corridor on land administered by the BLM. Temporary disturbance within the right-of-way is estimated to be 10.7 acres. Permanent disturbance is estimated to be 2.6 acres.

POSITION OF INTERESTED PARTIES

Following publication of the State and BLM joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Analysis (EIR/EA), the BLM received comment letters from Centinela Solar Energy, LLC and the Native American Heritage Commission.

Based on the analyses in the Draft EIR/EA and the EIR/EA, and on the public comments received on those documents, the BLM identified the following main concerns regarding the Selected Alternative (Alternative 3).

Cultural Resources: Construction activities associated with the Selected Alternative could indirectly affect cultural resources adjacent to the project impact areas due to increased traffic and water runoff during construction. Mitigation required for the Selected Alternative would reduce the potential for indirect impacts to cultural resources and details requirements for addressing previously unknown resources and/or human remains discovered during construction.

Biological Resources: The Selected Alternative would result in habitat loss for flat-tailed horned lizard (FTHL), a BLM-sensitive species, which will be managed according to the FTHL Rangewide Management Strategy and mitigated at a 6:1 compensation ratio. Burrowing owls have been identified on the private land generating facility site and will be managed according to State-defined protocol and mitigated by up to 6.5 acres/pair compensation. The Selected Alternative has a potential to impact nesting birds, and mitigation provided in the EIR/EA would be implemented to minimize impacts to avian species.

DECISION OPTIONS

The EIR/EA considered four alternatives and the No Action/No Project Alternative:

1. Proposed Action: A 275 MW PV project on 2,067 acres of private land in western Imperial County, southeast of the existing Imperial Valley Substation. The gen-tie line would extend across both privately owned and BLM-managed lands. This alternative would temporarily disturb approximately 18.16 acres on BLM land and permanently disturb approximately 4.77 acres on BLM land.
2. Alternative 1: Double Circuit Gen-tie Line Structures: The gen-tie line would be constructed along the same alignment as the Proposed Action but would include the installation of tower structures capable of supporting both the project 230 kV circuit and an additional 230 kV circuit. As a result, a gen-tie line from a future project could then be strung on the open side of the towers built as part of the CSE, thereby preventing future impacts associated with the construction of a separate set of gen-tie structures.
3. Alternative 2: Reduced Centinela Solar Energy Facility Site: The gen-tie alignment across BLM land would remain the same as under the other action alternatives, but three private parcels which are currently under Williamson Act agricultural land use

protection would be excluded from the solar facility. Removal of these three parcels would result in disturbance of approximately 335 fewer acres, and the amount of power produced by Alternative 2 would be reduced approximately 45 MW, to 230 MW.

4. Alternative 3- (Selected Alternative) Use Existing Electric Line Towers and 230-kV Line Looping: Alternative 3 includes construction of a "loop-in" to connect the CSE Project generating facility via the gen-tie line to an existing San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) line that runs to the Imperial Valley Substation. Additional private land infrastructure would be constructed, and two 230 kV lines would cross approximately 1.2 miles of BLM land along the gen-tie line alignment to the existing SDG&E towers. This alternative anticipates that, in the future, these facilities and the associated BLM right-of-way grant may be transferred to SDG&E for operation and maintenance.
5. Alternative 4-No Action/No Project Alternative: This alternative assumes that the CSE Project generating facility and gen-tie line would not be constructed.

The BLM has decided to select and approve Alternative 3 because it eliminates about three linear miles of new powerline structures (11 towers) on BLM land. Temporary disturbance within the right-of-way is estimated to be 10.7 acres. Permanent disturbance is estimated to be 2.6 acres. This decision will approve a BLM ROW authorization to connect the project on private land to the existing Imperial Valley Substation.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend you approve the decision regarding the right-of-way associated with the Centinela Solar Project. Your approval of this decision constitutes the final decision of the Department of the Interior and, in accordance with the regulations at 43 CFR 4.410(a)(3), is not subject to appeal under Departmental regulations at 43 CFR Part 4. Any challenge to this decision, including the BLM Authorized Officer's issuance of the right-of-way as approved by this decision, must be brought in Federal district court.

DECISION BY THE SECRETARY:

APPROVE: X

DISAPPROVE:

COMMENTS:

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Ken Salazar