

Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project



BLM

High Desert District - Rawlins Field Office, Wyoming

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. What is the purpose of this Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)?

A1. To analyze and disclose the effects of a proposal to develop wind energy within the boundaries of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Rawlins Field Office to the public, cooperating agencies, and interested public groups. The EIS will analyze the impacts of issuing rights-of-way for a wind energy project and ancillary facilities (consisting of access roads, electric power gathering cables, an electric transmission line, and electric substations). The EIS will address the proposed project and a range of reasonable alternatives including no action.

Q2. Will the public have an opportunity to participate in the NEPA process?

A2. Absolutely. The EIS is being prepared in accordance with applicable National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements. The NEPA process provides numerous opportunities for public review and comment. By regulation, there are two stages in the EIS process to participate; during the scoping period and during public review of the EIS. However, the BLM encourages active participation throughout project development. To ensure you are informed of opportunities to participate throughout project, please verify your address is on the project mailing list by contacting Pam Murdock, Project Manager, BLM Rawlins Field Office, (307) 328-4200 or email WYMail_PCW_Windfarm@blm.gov.

Q3. Why is a plan amendment being prepared for this project?

A3. The BLM evaluated the proposed project in accordance with all major authorizing laws, regulations, and policies. The proposed wind farm project is in conformance with the management goals and actions defined in the Rawlins Resource Management Plan (RMP); with the exception of visual resource management (VRM). The VRM Plan Amendment for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project (CCSM) is being addressed in Volume I of this document. BLM's decision to amend the Rawlins RMP is a prerequisite for approval of the project.

Q4. Why is the VRM Plan Amendment EIS being prepared for the decision area and not specifically for the CCSM project area?

A4. The Draft VRM Plan Amendment includes and extends 30 miles beyond the CCSM project area boundary (the decision area). Boundaries for the 30 mile area were redrawn to the northern extent of the checkerboard land ownership because federal lands north of this boundary would require consideration of other factors and would be better addressed in the Rawlins Field Office area wide VRM Plan Amendment. Boundaries for the 30 mile area were redrawn to the Wyoming state line to the south since the Rawlins Field Office's jurisdiction does not extend past the state line. Additionally, a small swath of isolated lands in the southeast area of



Saratoga Valley to the Wyoming state line were included in the 30 mile area because these areas are connected to, and influenced by, the Planning Area decisions. The area was part of the RMP Plan Amendment because it could potentially be affected by the CCSM project.

Q5. What is a “programmatic” EIS?

- A5. A programmatic EIS is generally prepared when a federal decision involves policies or alternatives affecting an entire federal effort or a broad, more regional area. The programmatic EIS is particularly useful as a base for tiering off site-specific analyses or in developing land use plans based on an ecosystem approach. For CCSM, the BLM will determine whether the application area is suitable for wind energy development. The programmatic EIS broadly evaluates impacts across the application area; however, specific impacts associated with the siting/location of individual project components not covered in this NEPA analysis would be evaluated in subsequent NEPA analyses based on site-specific proposals within the project area. For example, PCW may submit up to four separate plans of development for distinct aspects of the project, including the Chokecherry development area, the Sierra Madre development area, the haul road(s), and transmission line(s). The site-specific proposals would be tiered to the analysis and decision developed in this EIS.

Q6. What is tiering and how will it be applied to this project?

- A6. Tiering uses the coverage of general matters in broader NEPA documents (for example, the CCSM EIS) in subsequent, narrower NEPA documents (40 CFR 1508.28, 40 CFR 1502.20). This approach expedites subsequent NEPA analyses (*i.e.* determination of NEPA adequacy, categorical exclusion, environmental assessment, or EIS). Tiering is appropriate when the analysis for the proposed action is more site-specific or project-specific refinement or extension of the existing NEPA document. For example, during detailed design of the project (*i.e.* micrositing of turbine locations, roads, transmission lines, and support facilities) additional site-specific studies, including geotechnical investigations, threatened and endangered species surveys, and cultural surveys, would be conducted to help guide final design of the project. The final design and additional studies would be considered during subsequent NEPA analysis tiered to the analysis conducted in the programmatic EIS prior to issuance of any ROW grants. The environmental constraints (including constraints identified in the Avian Protection Plan [APP], Biological Opinion [BO], cultural programmatic agreement [PA], and mitigation measures identified in the programmatic EIS) would be incorporated by reference into any additional NEPA analysis and considered as stipulations of approval in any ROW grants.

Q7. Why is the EIS not analyzing the proposed action?

- A7. The applicant’s original proposed action was not evaluated in detail in the EIS. Following scoping, the applicant submitted a new alternative. The BLM reviewed the alternative and determined that it was a reasonable alternative for evaluation in the EIS. This alternative is identified as Alternative 1R in the EIS.

Q8. Has the federal government paid for analysis of this project proposal?

- A8. Although the proposed project is located on a combination of federal and private land, no direct costs accrue to the taxpayer in conjunction with the project. All

monetary costs associated with the project, including the project management, environmental analysis (including the salaries and expenses of the federal employees assigned to the project), permitting, development, and construction are paid or reimbursed by the project proponent in accordance with 43 CFR 2804.14.

Q8. What are the socioeconomic impacts of the project on the community?

A8. The State of Wyoming, Carbon County, City of Rawlins, and other local public entities would realize long-term socioeconomic benefits from the project. If authorized, the project would generate sales, use, and lodging taxes during the multi-year construction period, *ad valorem*/property taxes for the county and other taxing jurisdictions in which facilities are located, and wind energy production taxes on future generation. The business community would realize socioeconomic benefits in the form of sales revenues from new businesses and consumers. The project would support temporary and permanent jobs in the community and potentially provide the basis for other local job training and other wind power related education opportunities.

Q10. Can we still use BLM land if there is a wind turbine on it?

A10. There are no regulations prohibiting use of public lands with wind towers. However, please keep in mind that in all instances you must have permission to enter adjacent private lands, or cross private lands to access public lands with wind towers. For the CCSM project there will be no change to existing access to public lands other than restrictions to operations facilities and equipment for security and safety purposes.