



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

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Public Service Commission of Wisconsin
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December 12, 2018

Re: Application for a Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity of Badger Hollow Solar Farm, LLC to Construct an Electric Tie Line to Connect a Solar Electric Generation Facility to the Existing Transmission System, to be Located in Iowa County, Wisconsin

9697-CE-101

To the Person Addressed:

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) received an application from Badger Hollow Solar Farm LLC (Badger Hollow) for the construction of an electric tie line to connect a new solar facility to the existing transmission grid. The Commission also received an application from Badger Hollow to construct the new solar electric generation facility and associated facilities. The proposed project is located in western Iowa County, adjacent to the villages of Montfort and Cobb. The Commission is sending this letter to property owners directly along the proposed routes of the tie line or near the proposed solar facility site, as well as individuals who have asked to be placed on our mailing list. It is also being sent to public officials who may wish to place this notification in a location where it can be viewed by the public.

This is a Type II action under Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.10(2). It requires the preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) to determine if an environmental impact statement (EIS) is necessary under Wis. Stat. § 1.11. Commission staff from the Division of Energy Regulation completed an environmental review of the proposed project routes and prepared an EA to determine if an EIS is necessary. A notification of the Commission's intent to prepare an EA, including a solicitation for comments on the environmental aspects of this project, was mailed to landowners, local and regional media, affected municipal entities, the regional planning commission, and area legislators along the proposed routes on September 27, 2018.

The preliminary determination indicates that no significant impacts on the human or natural environment are likely to occur as a result of the construction and operation of this project for either of the routes under consideration. Therefore, preparation of an EIS is not required. Comments regarding this determination can be directed to the contact person listed at the end of this letter. The remainder of this letter describes the primary impacts of the route options and summarizes the conclusions of the EA. To obtain a copy of the EA, please request a copy from the contact person listed at the end of this letter.

Proposed Project

Badger Hollow is proposing a 300 megawatts photovoltaic (PV) solar electric generation facility and associated generator tie line. The project would be located on approximately 3,500 acres of primarily agricultural land in western Iowa County. The solar PV array would interconnect to a new 138-kilovolt (kV) project collector substation centralized in the array layout areas using a 34.5 kV underground collection system. At the collector substation, the voltage would be stepped up from 34.5 kV to 138 kV.

The proposed 138 kV generator tie line would run approximately 5 to 6 miles northwest from the Badger Hollow solar facilities' collector substation to the existing Eden substation or north to a "New Eden" substation, where it would interconnect to the existing electric grid. The 138 kV generator tie line would be constructed on a new right of way (ROW), and Badger Hollow has acquired the easements necessary for construction along the proposed routes. ROW widths would be 50 to 100 feet wide, with many expected to be in the lower end of that range. A range of structures could be used, including steel monopole, wooden three-pole, or steel H-frame, depending on engineering or site requirements. There would be one circuit, made up of three conductors, placed on these new structures, with the exception of one of the alternatives, which could have either double or triple-circuit design.

The properties needed for the project would be leased from landowners. Badger Hollow would develop, construct, and operate the generation facility. In a separate docket before the Commission,¹ Madison Gas and Electric and Wisconsin Public Service Corporation propose to purchase the Badger Hollow solar generation facility and tie line, as well as an additional proposed solar electric generation facility in Manitowoc County, Wisconsin.

Badger Hollow has proposed four possible routes for the tie line. Descriptions of these routes follow.

Red Route

The 5.7-mile long Red Route would head generally east 1.3 miles across farm fields from the proposed project Substation to Vickerman Road. The route then would turn north, following the road for 1.8 miles to U.S. Highway (USH) 18. After crossing the highway, the route continues generally north for another 2.6 miles across farmland, to the proposed New Eden Interconnection Substation. The New Eden Interconnection Substation would be constructed approximately 0.3 miles west of State Highway (STH) 80.

¹ Docket 5-BS-228

White Route

The 6.0-mile long White Route would follow the same path as the Red Route from the project Substation apart from the northern-most 1.6 miles. At Willow Springs Road (one mile north of USH 18), the White Route splits from the Red Route and heads west for 0.25 mile along Willow Springs Road. The White Route then would turn north, following the east edge of Tower Road for 0.5 mile, continuing north 0.6 mile across farmland when Tower Road turns to the west. At the existing Wyoming Valley to Eden 138 kV ATC transmission line ROW, the White Route then turns east, proceeding for 0.25 mile to a point where it turns north to enter the proposed New Eden Interconnection Substation from the south.

Pink Route

The 5.2-mile long Pink Route would travel north and then west of the proposed project Substation location to the existing Eden Substation on the east side of the Village of Montfort. From the project Substation, the route travels generally north and west 2.0 miles, making a series of 90-degree turns along new cross-country ROW. At a point on County Highway (CTH) B located 2.0 miles east of STH 80, the route turns west to follow the south side of the highway for 2.0 miles. The tie line would be double-circuited with existing 69 kV transmission and distribution lines along CTH B. At STH 80, the route turns to follow the existing lines, heading north on the east side of STH 80. Approximately 600 feet south of the intersection of STH 80 and USH 18, the Pink Route would turn northeast on the ATC Eden to Rewey 69 kV transmission line ROW to continue on that ROW to the existing Eden Substation.

Yellow Route

The 5.4-mile long Yellow Route would follow the same route as the Pink Route from the project Substation to CTH B. At CTH B, the Yellow Route would cross the highway and proceed west on the north side of the highway for 2.0 miles to STH 80. Along this segment it parallels the existing 69 kV transmission and distribution lines on the south side of the highway. The Yellow Route crosses STH 80 before turning north to travel along the west side of STH 80 for 1.0 mile, paralleling the existing transmission/distribution lines on the east side of the highway. At the intersection of STH 80 and USH 18, the Yellow Route would turn east and travel 0.3 mile along the south side of USH 18. The Yellow Route then makes a 90 degree turn to the north to cross the highway and head into the Eden Substation from the south.

Potential Natural Resource and Social Impacts

Each proposed route would cause environmental impacts based on the surrounding land use, habitats, and features such as wetlands, waterways, or presence of rare species.

During construction activities, there would be increased noise, dust and vibration in the construction areas. There would be increased traffic in the project area as employees and deliveries arrive and leave the project work areas. Loose or disturbed soils could be susceptible to erosion. Animals and vegetation in the project area could be displaced or damaged as a result of construction activities. There would be temporary and permanent impacts to wetlands, although if constructed as described in the application, these would be minor.

Permanent visual impacts will depend on where the tie line is located. Where the tie line would be located in new ROW, there would be greater visual impacts, but where it runs adjacent to existing lines or corridors, it would be less intrusive on the landscape.

Most of the land crossed by the two proposed routes is in agricultural production. Typical impacts that could be expected during construction in agricultural lands include damage to drainage tiles, crop damage, soil compaction, and damage to fences. After construction, an electric transmission line is generally compatible with agricultural land that is in row crop production. The tie line structures would be obstacles to cultivation, and when two or more lines are adjacent there can be increased difficulties cultivating around structures. Badger Hollow and its contractors should work with landowners or agricultural operators to identify features to avoid during construction and the timing of agricultural operations to reduce or mitigate impacts.

When a transmission line ROW crosses natural habitats, such as wetlands or woodlands, woody vegetation is typically cleared. Transmission lines can be a hazard to large birds flying through the area, particularly if there is low visibility.

Conclusion

No significant environmental effects are expected to result from the proposed project along either of the potential routes as described with stated construction methods and mitigation plans. A number of temporary impacts similar to those seen on other transmission line projects would likely occur during the construction phase. The addition of the new tie line would create long-term effects, primarily in agricultural lands.

No significant impacts on the human environment that would warrant the preparation of an EIS are expected if this project is constructed along either of the route alternatives. Thus, preparation of an EIS, as described in Wis. Stat. § 1.11, is not required for this project.

Copies of the EA are available upon request, either in electronic or paper format (for a paper copy, an address must be provided). Requests for a copy of the EA should be made to Adam Ingwell at the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin by telephone at (608) 267-9197, by e-mail at adam.ingwell@wisconsin.gov, or by regular mail directed to the Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 7854, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7854.

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Comments on the finding of no significant impact for this proposed project should be made to Adam Ingwell at the address above, by email, or through the Commission's web comment form. Go to the Commission's web site at <http://psc.wi.gov> , click on "File a Comment" button. On the next page, select the "File a comment" link that appears for docket number 9697-CE-101.

All comments must be received by Monday January 7, 2019.



Adam Ingwell
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