



Public Service Commission of Wisconsin

Rebecca Cameron Valcq, Chairperson
Ellen Nowak, Commissioner
Tyler Huebner, Commissioner

4822 Madison Yards Way
P.O. Box 7854
Madison, WI 53707-7854

October 27, 2020

Re: Application for Grant County Solar, LLC to Construct a 9804-CE-100
New Solar Electric Generation Facility located near Potosi
and Harrison Townships, in Grant County, Wisconsin

To the Person Addressed:

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (Commission) received an application from Grant County Solar, LLC (GCS) for the construction of a new solar electric generation facility and associated facilities. The proposed project is located in the Town of Potosi, in Grant County, Wisconsin. The Commission is sending this letter to property owners near the proposed solar facilities, including the new substation and switchyard, 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.

The solar electric generation facility is a Type III action under Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.10(3). Type III actions normally do not require preparation of an environmental assessment (EA) or an environmental impact statement (EIS) under Wis. Admin. Code § PSC 4.10(3). However, an evaluation of a specific Type III proposal may indicate that the preparation of an EA is warranted for that proposal. Commission staff from the Division of Digital Access, Consumer and Environmental Affairs completed an environmental review of the proposed project and prepared an EA to determine if an EIS was 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 in the project area on June 25, 2020.

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. 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 project 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

GCS is proposing a 200 megawatts photovoltaic (PV) solar electric generation facility. The project study area evaluated during the project development is approximately 2,058 acres. The proposed solar arrays and associated facilities would be located on approximately 1,403 acres, with another 204 acres available for consideration as alternative arrays. The major components of the proposed project include PV panels, inverters, approximately 32 miles of underground 34.5 kilovolt (kV) collector circuits, a new 345kV substation adjacent to the new Tennyson Switchyard on Stage Road, a new approximately 200-foot 138kV generator tie line, and a permanent operation and maintenance building.

Arrays are located on primarily agricultural land. The proposed project area is roughly bounded by Old Potosi Road to the west, Substation Road to the north, West Road to the east, and Seemore Road and British Hollow Road to the south.

Potential Natural Resource and Social Impacts

The proposed project would cause environmental impacts based on the surrounding land use, habitats, residences, and features such as wetlands, waterways, and historic resources. During construction activities, there would be increased noise, dust, and vibration in the construction areas. Pile drivers installing the steel supports for the project would be one particular source of loud noise during construction, based on the location of work and nearby residences. There would be increased traffic in the project area as employees and deliveries arrive at and leave the project work areas. All of the arrays and the substations would be fenced off. The substation would have chain link fence with barbed wire on the top, but the solar arrays would use seven to eight foot high agricultural or deer fencing, which does not use barbed wire. A visual change in the project area from open agricultural fields to a more industrial landscape of fencing and rows of solar panels would affect viewers differently. Some landowners that do not receive direct benefits from the project may react more negatively to the proposed project.

Loose or disturbed soils could be susceptible to erosion or establishment of invasive plant species. Animals and vegetation in the project area could be displaced or damaged as a result of construction activities. Construction in and through agricultural fields would result in both temporary and long-term impacts. The solar PV arrays, new collector substation, O&M building, laydown area, and the 20-foot buffer outside all fenced areas would be taken out of agricultural production for the construction and operational life of the project (35-50 years). GCS is avoiding direct disturbance to wetlands and waterways and minimizing clearing of forest-land in the project area. Some solar projects have done mass grading of soils prior to pile driving, and if there are heavy precipitation events, this can cause soil erosion and storm water runoff. The use of best management practices during construction, and thorough post-construction restoration could reduce many of these direct impacts. The site is planned to be seeded with low growing grasses and some areas of more diverse native flowering plants. This would stabilize and improve soils while limiting any runoff from panels onto adjacent properties.

Broken or damaged drainage tiles could be a long term impact to the project area, including adjacent fields. Some of these impacts might not be immediately known. Damage to drainage tiles on land hosting the PV facility may impact adjacent properties if not repaired correctly. GCS states it would monitor the site under its ongoing operations and maintenance for these problems. Landowners should document any problems and bring them to the attention of GCS to determine if an issue with drainage can be repaired. It is not fully known whether decommissioning the project site can allow for a return of impacted properties to agricultural use. It appears likely that thorough decommissioning, including decompacting soils and repairing any damaged drainage tiles, would allow for a return to agricultural use in the future.

GCS does not provide a site-specific cost of decommissioning, but states it will provide non-binding estimated decommissioning costs on a confidential basis.

Conclusion

The project as proposed in the application and subsequent filings, including use of the stated construction methods and implementation of the mitigation plans, is not expected to cause any significant environmental effects. There would be increased noise, dust, and vibration which may affect nearby residents during the construction of project facilities. A change in the landscape from agricultural fields to a more developed area with panels, associated facilities, and fencing would be noticeable to local landowners and those driving through the area. There could be increased soil erosion and storm water runoff from the site, particularly when soils have been disturbed and during heavy precipitation events.

No significant impacts on the human environment that would warrant the preparation of an EIS are expected if this project were constructed using some combination of the currently proposed array sites. 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 email at adam.ingwell@wisconsin.gov or by regular mail directed to the Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 7854, Madison, Wisconsin 53707-7854.

Comments on the finding of no significant impact for this proposed project should be made to Adam Ingwell at the address above, by email at adam.ingwell@wisconsin.gov or via the Commission's website at where you can go to the "e-services" tab toward the top of the webpage, then click "file a comment" on the left hand side of the page, then locate docket 9804-CE-100.

All comments must be received by Monday, November 16, 2020.

Sincerely,



Adam Ingwell
Environmental Affairs Coordinator - Supervisor
Division of Digital Access, Consumer and Environmental Affairs