



Oregon

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To: Energy Facility Siting Council

From: Sarah Esterson, Senior Policy Advisor

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Subject: Agenda Item J (Information Item):
Montague Solar Facility – Council Review of Preconstruction Wildlife Surveys
for the April 22-23, 2021 EFSC Meeting

INTRODUCTION

The Montague Solar Facility (facility) is a 162 megawatt (MW) solar photovoltaic energy generation facility located in Gilliam County, south of the City of Arlington. The certificate holder is Montague Solar, LLC, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Avangrid Renewables, LLC. Facility construction commenced in March 2021 and is anticipated to be operational in 2nd or 3rd Quarter 2022.

The Montague Solar Facility site certificate requires that the Oregon Department of Energy (Department) present preconstruction survey results and any required agency consultations during a regularly scheduled Energy Facility Siting Council (Council) meeting. This site certificate requirement was imposed by Council in response to public comments on Request for Amendment 2 of the Montague Wind Power Facility Site Certificate, which was then carried over to the Montague Solar Facility Site Certificate through a site certificate split (Final Order on Amendment 5 of the Montague Wind Power Facility Site Certificate) where an amended site certificate and two original site certificates were issued, all of which were substantially similar and based on a split or allocation of approved facility components.

SITE CERTIFICATE CONDITIONS REQUIRING WILDLIFE SURVEYS

Council previously imposed Conditions 31, 94 and 95 requiring that the certificate holder conduct habitat and wildlife surveys prior to construction, as summarized below:

- Condition 31 requires a final habitat assessment of all areas to be temporarily or permanently impacted by construction activities and facility components; and consultation with the Department, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife (ODFW) and Gilliam County.
- Condition 94 requires completion of a protocol-level Washington ground squirrel survey in areas of suitable habitat that could be impacted by construction or operations; and consultation with the Department and ODFW.
- Condition 95 requires wildlife surveys for state-listed Threatened and Endangered Species; and consultation with the Department, and as applicable ODFW and Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA).

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS AND AGENCY CONSULTATION

Habitat Assessment (Condition 31)

The certificate holder completed a field-level habitat assessment of all areas of potential temporary and permanent disturbance in 2020. Detailed habitat mapping and habitat impact tables were submitted to the Department, ODFW and Gilliam County Planning Department for review in January and February, 2021. ODFW concurred with the habitat categorization in April 2021.

Based on the assessment, permanent impacts include approximately 1,226 acres of Category 6 (developed – dryland wheat) habitat; temporary impacts include approximately 14.6 acres of Category 6 (developed – dryland wheat, other) and 0.1 acres of Category 4 (grassland – exotic annual).

Final habitat assessment results will be presented to Council during the April 23, 2021 meeting.

Washington Ground Squirrel Survey (Condition 94)

The certificate holder submitted a protocol for preconstruction Washington ground-squirrel (WGS) surveys to the Department and ODFW. The protocol was reviewed and approved on April 30, 2020. WGS surveys were conducted on May 4, 27 and 30, 2020 within approximately 307 acres of potentially suitable habitat, which includes areas along the transmission line route along Old Tree Road to OR-19. During the WGS surveys, there were no active colonies identified and therefore there was no Category 1 habitat identified.

During WGS surveys, biologists also searched for burrowing owls; there were no burrowing owls or signs (pellets, calls) identified.

The draft WGS Survey Report was submitted to the Department and ODFW for review. ODFW and the Department reviewed and concurred with the draft WGS Survey Report on February 9, 2021. Final survey results will be presented to Council during the April 23, 2021 meeting.

Threatened and Endangered Species Surveys (Condition 95)

The certificate holder conducted surveys for the state-listed Threatened and Endangered plant species, Laurent's milkvetch, on June 24, 2020. The survey area included all areas not currently in agricultural production or containing residential or farm operation facilities, which could be impacted during construction and operation. All plant species encountered during the survey were identified to at least genus and to the level necessary to ensure that they were no special-status plant species. Based on the survey, there were no threatened or endangered plant species identified.

The draft Rare Plant Survey Report was submitted to the Department and ODA on January 6, 2021. ODA and the Department reviewed and concurred with the survey Rare Plant Survey Report on February 10, 2021. Final survey results will be presented to Council during the April 23, 2021 meeting.