

Sweetland Wind Farm Project

*Revised Finding of No Significant Impact and
Decision Document*

Hand County, South Dakota



**Western Area
Power Administration**



**United States Fish and
Wildlife Service**

*DOE/EA-2095-S1
November 2022*

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Western Area Power Administration (WAPA)
U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)

ACTION: Revised Finding of No Significant Impact and selection of Modified Proposed Action for implementation.

SUMMARY: Sweetland Wind Farm, LLC (Sweetland) proposes to construct the Sweetland Wind Farm Project (Project), an approximately 200-megawatt (MW) wind farm. The Project would be located within a 21,006-acre area southeast of the City of Miller in Hand County, South Dakota. Sweetland proposed to interconnect the Project with Western Area Power Administration's (WAPA's) existing Fort Thompson to Huron 230-kV transmission line. The Project and proposed interconnection are collectively referred to as the Proposed Action.

WAPA's decision to grant or deny the interconnection request is considered a federal action under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Therefore, an Environmental Assessment (EA) (*Sweetland Wind Farm Project, DOE/EA-2095*, hereafter called "2021 EA") was prepared to analyze the potential environmental impacts of the action. The 2021 EA tiered from the analysis conducted in the Upper Great Plains Wind Energy Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS), a document prepared jointly by WAPA and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) (2015). Applicable material from the PEIS was incorporated by reference in the EA, in accordance with 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) § 1501.11. The EA is intended to be read in conjunction with the PEIS, and the EA and PEIS together comprise the NEPA documentation for this Federal action. On September 24, 2021, WAPA signed a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and selected the Proposed Action for implementation.

Following the completion of the 2021 EA and FONSI, Sweetland proposed to redesign a 1.5-mile-long portion of the approximately 7-mile-long, 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line (gen-tie) outside of the area previously analyzed in the 2021 EA, of which 0.6-miles crosses a portion of land encumbered by a USFWS Grassland Easement. The USFWS must consider whether to deny or support the issuance of a USFWS Right-of-Way permit for the temporary construction disturbance and installation of three wooden H-frame transmission line structures (each structure includes two 14" poles, for a total of 6 poles in the ground) with less than 0.01 acres of permanent impact to a USFWS Grassland Easement.

Therefore, WAPA and the USFWS (hereafter, called the "Agencies") prepared a Supplement to the EA (SEA, *DOE-EA-2095-SI*) to analyze potential impacts of the newly proposed gen-tie line route which were not previously analyzed in the 2021 EA. WAPA held the role of Lead Federal Agency and the USFWS served as a Cooperating Agency in the preparation of the SEA.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, CONTACT: A copy of all associated NEPA documents are available at the following website:

<https://www.wapa.gov/regions/UGP/Environment/Pages/environment.aspx>.

For additional information, please contact:

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Or

United States Fish and Wildlife Service
Western South Dakota WMD Complex
Huron Wetland Management District
20721 392nd Ave
Wolsey, SD 57384

MODIFIED PROPOSED ACTION: The Modified Proposed Action remains as described in the 2021 EA, with the exception of the following changed components:

- The 2021 EA had analyzed the gen-tie line segment on the south side of WAPA’s existing Fort Thompson to Huron 230-kv transmission line, which would require crossing over WAPA’s existing line twice. As proposed in the redesign, the segment would instead parallel the north side of WAPA’s existing Fort Thompson to Huron 230-kV line and across a 0.6-mile portion of land encumbered by a USFWS Grassland Easement. The proposed 230-kV gen-tie line would parallel the north side of WAPA’s existing 230-kV transmission line along a 1.5-mile-long portion of the route. This gen-tie route adjustment would avoid additional and potentially hazardous transmission line crossings and improve the overall reliability and safety of the proposed project.
- The gen-tie easement would be 150 feet wide and would encompass approximately 10.4 acres within the USFWS Grassland Easement (Figure 2-1 of the SEA). This span would require the installation of three wooden H-frame transmission line structures (each structure includes two poles, for a total of 6 poles in the ground) within the USFWS Grassland Easement area.
- The dimensions of the gen-tie itself would remain the same as proposed in the 2021 EA. That is, the line would be a single-circuit powerline with two-pole wooden H-frame structures with a height of approximately 75 feet.

ALTERNATIVES: The SEA presented a “No Action” alternative, which assumed the Project would be constructed as described in the 2021 EA, with the gen-tie line paralleling the south side of WAPA’s existing Fort Thompson to Huron 230-kV line and would avoid USFWS Grassland Easements entirely.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT: In addition to the public opportunities described in the 2021 EA and FONSI, the Agencies circulated the draft SEA for public review and comment beginning on July 9, 2022. Comments were accepted through August 11, 2022. The comment period was advertised through newspaper announcements, a project website, and individual letters to landowners and agencies within and near the Project area. A summary of comments received and responses is included in Appendix A of the SEA.

TRIBAL INVOLVEMENT: In addition to the tribal involvement described in the 2021 EA and FONSI, cultural resource staff from Burns & McDonnell and traditional cultural specialists (TCS)

from the Yankton Sioux Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO), conducted cultural resource and tribal resource field surveys to identify new or previously recorded cultural resources eligible for listing on the NRHP. No archaeological sites were identified during the field survey. However, previously unidentified prehistoric/unknown Native American-affiliated stone features were identified within the New Survey Area, resulting in the identification of 22 previously unidentified/unknown features and an expansion of the previously identified TCP-HD-TEMP1 landscape boundary. Feature TCP-HD-TEMP1 has been determined eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. A report summarizing the results of the cultural resource survey was submitted for SHPO and tribal review (Shaver, 2022). To date, no comments have been received.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS: The SEA disclosed the potential environmental impacts of the Modified Proposed Action and No Action alternatives. A summary of environmental impacts for each impacted resource area is described in Table 1, below.

For the following resources, the Modified Proposed Action would not result in any additional or different impacts beyond those previously analyzed in the 2021 EA:

- Geology, Soil, and Paleontology
- Water Quality, Floodplains
- Air Quality
- Noise
- Noxious Weeds
- Soils
- Wildlife
- Socioeconomics
- Environmental Justice

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITMENTS: Environmental commitments have been embedded as a required component of the Modified Proposed Action alternative and are listed in Chapter 3 of the EA and Chapter 3 of the SEA.

Table 1: Summary of Environmental Impacts of Alternatives

Resource Area	Scope of Potential Impacts
Wetlands	There would be no permanent impacts to wetlands under either the Modified Proposed Action or No Action Alternative.
Vegetation	<p>A slightly larger vegetated area would be affected within the new gen-tie easement than the 2021 easement area (26.5 acres in the 2021 EA versus 27.9 acres in the SEA). However, the total number of transmission structures on this segment of the gen-tie would be the same (11) under both route options and the vegetation types are the same as previously analyzed. There would be three structures in Grassland Easement area under this proposed new alignment while there were none under the 2021 alignment.</p> <p>Construction of the proposed new gen-tie would temporarily disturb up to 27.9 acres of vegetation, of which 7.1 acres would be agricultural land (hay/pasture) and 20.8 acres would be non-agricultural land (19.7 acres herbaceous/grassland and 0.9 acre developed open land). Project construction would result in a temporary (one growing season) loss of crop production and pasture grasses. Impacts to non-agricultural land, such as trampling, crushing, and soil compaction, would occur to 19.7 acres of grasslands rated as Average quality or below and 0.9 acre of developed open space.</p>
Threatened and Endangered Species	No change in Effects determinations and re-initiated consultation with USFWS is not necessary.
Cultural Resources	<p>In April 2022, archeologists from Burns & McDonnell and a Traditional Cultural Specialist (TCS) from the Yankton Sioux THPO completed a joint archeological and tribal field survey.</p> <p>No archaeological sites were identified during the field survey. However, previously unidentified prehistoric/unknown Native American-affiliated stone features were identified within the New Survey Area, resulting in the identification of 22 previously unidentified/unknown features and an expansion of the previously identified TCP-HD-TEMP1 landscape boundary. Feature TCP-HD-TEMP1 has been determined eligible for inclusion on the NRHP. A report summarizing the results of the cultural resource survey was submitted for SHPO and THPO review. The SHPO concurred on August 4, 2022.</p>
Land Use	The project study area contains a total of 38.1 acres of USFWS Grassland Easement. The new gen-tie line corridor contains a total of 10.4 acres of USFWS Grassland Easement. Following construction, the 27.9 acres would be returned to pre-construction land uses, primarily hay and pastureland, and 0.1 acre would be permanently maintained for O&M use.
Visual Resources	The new gen-tie route would be closer to a residence but is still approximately 925 feet away; therefore, impacts would be within the scope of impacts previously analyzed in the 2021 EA.
Health and Safety	The new proposed gen-tie alignment will improve both safety and reliability by eliminating two crossings of the existing WAPA transmission line.

FINDING: The Agencies evaluated the potential environmental impacts at a variety of contexts, including national, regional, and local scales and intensities. The Agencies identified no significant impacts to environmental resources or the human environment, either individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area, which would result from the Modified Proposed Action.

The Agencies found that neither alternative constitutes a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. As a result, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is still warranted and an Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared.

This Revised FONSI was prepared in accordance with *Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act* (40 CFR §1501.6), the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures (10 CFR §1021.322), and the USFWS NEPA Implementing Procedures (43 CFR 46).

Regarding the Modified Proposed Action alternative, the principal reason for the lack of significant environmental impacts is the use of avoidance measures and environmental commitments as a required component of the Project. Additionally:

- Consultation with SHPO has been completed in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA and concurrence was received on WAPA’s determination of “no adverse effect.”
- Consultation with the USFWS was completed in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act and concurrence was received on WAPA’s determinations of “no effect” and “may affect, not likely to adversely affect.”
- In compliance with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, construction impacts to jurisdictional wetlands would be authorized under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Nationwide Permit 57, without a pre-construction notification. Sweetland would adhere to all Nationwide Permit 57 conditions.

DECISION RECORD: WAPA has selected the Modified Proposed Action alternative, including all environmental commitments and minimization measures described in DOE/EA-2095 and DOE/EA-2095-S1, for implementation.

Issued in Watertown, South Dakota on December 6, 2022.

Lloyd A. Linke

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Lloyd A. Linke
Senior Vice President and UGP Regional Manager

DECISION RECORD: USFWS has selected the Modified Proposed Action alternative, including all environmental commitments and minimization measures described in DOE/EA-2095 and DOE/EA-2095-S1, for implementation.

Issued in Lakewood, Colorado on December 6, 2022.

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Stacy Armitage
Assistant Regional Director, USFWS, National Wildlife Refuge System