

CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION1516 NINTH STREET
SACRAMENTO, CA 95814-5112**DOCKET****09-AFC-09**DATE OCT 12 2009RECD. OCT 13 2009

October 12, 2009

TO: AGENCY DISTRIBUTION LIST

REQUEST FOR AGENCY PARTICIPATION IN THE REVIEW OF THE RIDGECREST SOLAR POWER PROJECT, APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION (09-AFC-9)

On September 1, 2009, Solar Millennium LLC (applicant) submitted an Application for Certification (AFC) to the California Energy Commission to develop the Ridgecrest Solar Power Project (RSPP) on federal land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Kern County, California.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Solar Millennium LLC (Applicant) is proposing to construct a utility-scale solar thermal electric power generating facility. The RSPP will have a nominal output of 250 megawatts (MW), consisting of a single power plant utilizing two solar fields. The RSPP will utilize parabolic trough technology to generate electricity. With this technology, arrays of parabolic mirrors collect heat energy from the sun and refocus the radiation on a receiver tube located at the focal point of the parabola. A heat transfer fluid (HTF) reaches high temperatures (750 degrees Fahrenheit [°F]) as it circulates through the receiver tubes. The HTF is then piped through a series of heat exchangers where it releases its stored energy to generate high pressure steam. The steam is then fed to a traditional steam turbine generator where electricity is produced.

The project is proposed to be developed on a 3,920-acre site, administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The project site is located in north-eastern Kern County, along U.S Highway 395, just west of the China Lake Boulevard exit. The site is approximately four miles southwest of Ridgecrest, California. Ridgecrest is at the southern boundary of the northernmost of two discrete sections of China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS).

TRANSMISSION

A new 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line will interconnect with Southern California Edison's (SCE) existing 230 kV InyoKern/Kramer Junction transmission line passing west of the RSPP site. The California Independent System Operator (CAISO) and SCE initiated a Phase I Cluster Study in the fall of 2008. The Transition Cluster Phase I Interconnection Study was released on July 28, 2009.

WATER USE AND DISCHARGE

The proposed project would utilize an air cooled condenser (ACC), also known as a dry cooling system because it does not use water for power plant cooling. Water will be used for solar mirror washing, feedwater makeup, firewater supply, dust control, and onsite domestic use. Total consumption for the facility is estimated at 150 acre-feet per

year which is proposed to be supplied by Indian Wells Water District via a new five-mile pipeline.

BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

The proposed project site is confirmed to contain habitat for and presence of desert tortoise (federal- and state-listed as threatened). The site also contains a conservation area for Mohave ground squirrel (state-listed as threatened). The Energy Commission and BLM will work closely with the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to assess potential impacts to these species.

WATERS OF THE STATE

The proposed project site contains several linear miles of desert dry washes considered to be waters of the state which the applicant proposes to relocate. As such, the project will require at least two streambed alteration agreements. The Energy Commission and BLM will work closely with CDFG and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB), Lahontan Region, to assess potential impacts to waters of the state, and also evaluate proposed design/engineering of new diversion channels.

ENERGY COMMISSION AND BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT JOINT REVIEW PROCESS

The BLM and the Energy Commission have executed a Memorandum of Understanding concerning their intent to conduct a joint environmental review of the project in a single National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)/California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) process. It is in the interest of the BLM and the Energy Commission to share in the preparation of a joint environmental analysis of the proposed project to avoid duplication of staff efforts, to share staff expertise and information, to promote intergovernmental coordination at the local, state, and federal levels, and to facilitate public review by providing a joint document and a more efficient environmental review process.

Under federal law, the BLM is responsible for processing requests for rights-of-way to authorize the proposed project and associated transmission lines and other facilities to be constructed and operated on land it manages. In processing applications, the BLM must comply with the requirements of NEPA, which requires that federal agencies reviewing projects under their jurisdiction consider the environmental impacts associated with the proposed project construction and operation.

As the lead agency under CEQA, the Energy Commission is responsible for reviewing and ultimately approving or denying all applications to construct and operate thermal electric power plants, 50 MW and greater, in California. The Energy Commission's facility certification process carefully examines public health and safety, environmental impacts and engineering aspects of proposed power plants and all related facilities such as electric transmission lines, and natural gas and water pipelines.

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The first step in the Energy Commission's review process is for staff to determine whether or not the AFC contains all the information required by its regulations. When the Energy Commission determines the AFC is complete, staff will begin data discovery and issue analysis phases. At that time, a detailed examination of the issues will occur.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Energy Commission and the BLM will conduct several public workshops. These workshops will provide the public as well as local, state and federal agencies the opportunity to ask questions about, and provide input on, the proposed project. All public notices will be made in accordance with the Energy Commission's notice requirements, and the BLM's notice requirements set forth by NEPA and BLM's environmental review policies. Please direct your technical or project schedule questions to the Energy Commission's Project Manager, Eric Solorio, at (916) 651-0966, or by e-mail at esolorio@energy.state.ca.us.

If you desire information on participating in the Energy Commission's review of the project, please contact the Energy Commission's Public Adviser's Office, at (916) 654-4489 or toll free in California, at (800) 822-6228. The Public Adviser's Office can also be contacted via email at publicadviser@energy.state.ca.us. News media inquiries should be directed to the media office at (916) 654-4989 or via email at mediaoffice@energy.state.ca.us.

The status of the proposed project, copies of notices, an electronic version of the AFC, and other relevant documents are also available on the Energy Commission's web site at: http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/solar_millennium_ridgecrest/index.html. You can also subscribe to receive e-mail notification of all notices at <http://www.energy.ca.gov/listservers>. By being on the mailing list, you will receive notices of all project-related activities and notices when documents related to the proposed project's evaluation are available for review. If you want your name removed from the mailing list, please contact Mineka Foggie, Project Assistant, at (916) 653-1608 or by email at mfoggie@energy.state.ca.us.

Sincerely,

Originally Signed By
Eileen Allen, Manager
Energy Facilities Siting and Compliance Office

Enclosure: Ridgecrest Solar Power Project,
Application for Certification (09-AFC-9)