

Chapter 1. Introduction

This document is the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Maiden Wind Farm, prepared by Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) and Benton County. This document has been prepared as an “abbreviated” final EIS pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations and Washington’s State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) regulations because there have been no substantial changes to the proposed action, alternatives, or environmental analysis presented in the draft EIS for this project. Consistent with 40 C.F.R. 1503.4(c) and WAC 197-11-560(5), this abbreviated final EIS provides an updated cover (i.e., fact) sheet, comments received on the draft EIS, agency responses to these comments, and changes made to the text of the draft EIS. This final EIS should be used as a companion document to the draft EIS (dated March 2002), which contains the full text of the affected environment and environmental analysis, and appendices. For readers of this final EIS who do not already have a copy of the draft EIS, copies of the draft EIS may be obtained by several means:

- ~~✍~~ calling BPA's document request line at 1-800-622-4520;
- ~~✍~~ sending an e-mail to Sarah Branum, Environmental Coordinator at stbranum@bpa.gov;
- ~~✍~~ accessing the document on BPA’s web site at <http://www.efw.bpa.gov> (click on Active Environmental Projects); or
- ~~✍~~ contacting the Benton County Planning and Building Department at 1002 Dudley Avenue in Prosser, 509-786-5612.

The remainder of this introduction provides an overview of the proposed action and alternatives, the comment period for the draft EIS, and key changes to the draft EIS. Chapter 2 of this final EIS identifies the specific changes that have been made to the text of the draft EIS. Chapter 3 presents comments received on the draft EIS (organized by the chapters and sections of the draft EIS), as well as agency responses to these comments. Chapter 4 includes copies of comment letters, e-mails, telephone logs, and meeting summary received on the draft EIS.

Summary of the Proposed Action

BPA’s proposed action is the execution of power purchase and construction and generation interconnection agreements to acquire and transmit up to 50 aMW (up to about 200 MW) of output from the proposed Maiden Wind Farm, which would be developed to generate up to 494 MW. Benton and Yakima Counties’ proposed action is to grant Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) and other required permits for full build-out of the project, which would require construction of up to 549 wind turbines for a 494-MW project.

The EIS evaluates two alternatives – the Proposed Action (which means that part or all of the proposed project would be built) and No Action. BPA would not purchase or transmit power from the project under the No Action Alternative and it is therefore likely that the project would not be constructed.

Washington Winds Inc. proposes to construct and operate up to 494 megawatts (MW) of wind generation on privately- and publicly-owned property in Benton and Yakima Counties, Washington. This EIS evaluates the environmental effects of BPA's Proposed Action to execute power purchase and interconnection agreements for the purpose of acquiring up to 50 average megawatts (aMW) (up to about 200 MW) of the project developer's proposed Maiden Wind Farm. The project developer has requested a CUP for up to 494 MW. Although the full 494 MW of power may or may not be constructed, this EIS evaluates impacts from full build-out of the project.

The project would be located about 10 miles northeast of Sunnyside in the Rattlesnake Hills and would occupy approximately 251 acres of land. Approximately 1,063 acres would be temporarily occupied during construction by facilities such as staging areas, equipment laydown areas, and rock quarries. Except for portions of two sections of land owned by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the project would be constructed on privately-owned farm and ranch land in Benton and Yakima Counties.

The major facilities of the project include up to 549 wind turbines with small transformers at the base of each turbine tower, underground and overhead collector cables, access roads, up to two substations, up to three operation and maintenance buildings, a potential 4-mile 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, and up to four meteorological towers (see Figure 2.1-2 in the Draft EIS). Construction of the project could begin in early 2003, with at least partial power generation expected as early as December 2003. Construction of the full project would take about nine months.

Draft EIS Comment Period

On March 26, 2002, BPA sent letters to about 350 interested or affected governments, agencies, organizations, and individuals. Copies of the Draft EIS or the Summary of the Draft EIS were mailed to those who had requested one. BPA also posted the Draft EIS on its website and published a notice in the monthly *BPA Journal* that is mailed to customers and others interested in the agencies work.

An open-house style meeting was held on April 23, 2002, in Prosser, Washington, to receive comments on the Draft EIS. The comment period officially closed on May 15, 2002, but BPA continued to accept comments after that date.

Key Changes to the Draft EIS

The following summarizes the primary changes that have been made to the draft EIS. For a complete description of all changes to the draft EIS, please see Chapter 2.

- ~~///~~ Updated potential construction and operation dates.
- ~~///~~ Provided additional information on Washington State and county permits that may be required for the project.
- ~~///~~ Corrected the name of the Battelle Gravitational Physics Laboratory (BGPL) and provided results of a seismic study done to help determine impacts to the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO).

- ~~///~~ Added information on a Wildlife Area within the study area for recreation impacts.
- ~~///~~ Clarified effects to "priority" habitats and mitigation for vegetation impacts.
- ~~///~~ Updated the wildlife section with results from the winter season of the avian study.
- ~~///~~ Added consideration for nighttime migrants to mitigation for visual resources.
- ~~///~~ Updated the cultural resources section with more detailed information from the second phase of survey work, and clarified cultural resources mitigation.
- ~~///~~ Corrected and clarified information in the traffic and transportation section

Chapter 2. Changes to Draft EIS Text

This chapter identifies the specific changes to the text of the Draft EIS. Text changes are organized by the chapters and sections of the Draft EIS. For each change, the location of the change is identified by page and paragraph number of the Draft EIS. Where text has been modified, deleted text is indicated in “~~striketrough~~” format and new text is underlined.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Page VII, the following entry is modified as follows:

BGPLR~~Ø~~ Battelle Gravitational Physics Laboratory~~Research Observatory~~

Glossary

Page XIV, the following entry is added:

Special status species Plants and animals listed for special protection or management consideration by federal or state authorities. Federal status species include species listed as endangered or threatened by the USFWS, species formally proposed for listing, and candidates for listing. State status wildlife species are listed by the WDFW Wildlife Management Program as endangered, threatened, sensitive, or as candidates for these designations. State status plant species are those identified by the Washington Natural Heritage Program as endangered, threatened, sensitive, review, or extirpated, and those on the “watch” list (i.e., species more abundant or less threatened than previously assumed)

Summary

Page S-3, paragraph 7 is modified as follows:

The major facilities of the project include up to 549 wind turbines with small transformers at the base of each turbine tower, underground and overhead collector cables, access roads, up to two substations, up to three operation and maintenance buildings, a potential 4-mile 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, and up to four meteorological towers (see Figure 2.1-2). Construction of the project could begin in ~~summer 2002~~ early 2003, with at least partial power generation expected as early as ~~winter 2002~~ December 2003. Construction of the full project would take about nine months.

Page S-7, Table S-1, the following entries are modified as follows: