

BEFORE THE OHIO POWER SITING BOARD

In the Matter of the Application of Ross County Solar, LLC for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need.)))))	Case No. 20-1380-EL-BGN
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DIRECT TESTIMONY OF RYAN RUPPRECHT

Q.1. Please state your name, title and business address.

A.1. My name is Ryan Rupprecht. I am a Senior Project Manager, Practice Lead for the Renewable Energy Group in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic and Midwest regions, and a Practice Lead for the Eastern Region Siting and Licensing Group for Cardno, Inc. (“Cardno”). My business address is 121 Continental Drive, Suite 308, Newark, Delaware 19713.

Q.2. What are your duties as a Senior Project Manager and Practice Lead?

A.2. I work for Cardno’s Science and Environment Division, focusing on permitting and compliance for various energy projects in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic and Midwest. I am responsible for developing, managing, and performing consulting work involving environmental permitting, terrestrial and aquatic ecological resource studies, wetland and stream delineations, and surface water quality assessments. As a Senior Project Manager, I manage and participate in environmental permitting projects, overseeing technical experts in biology/ecology, wetland sciences, cultural resources, and rare, threatened & endangered (“RTE”) species habitat assessments. As a Practice Lead, I coordinate and market Cardno’s services for permitting, compliance, and siting and licensing. My duties also include overall quality assurance for projects, keeping current with relevant laws,

1 regulations, rules, policies, and guidelines, and adapting our practices to trends and changes
2 in the environmental consulting field.

3 I served as Cardno's Deputy Project Manager and Quality Assurance/Quality Control
4 reviewer for the Ross County Solar Project ("Project"). I was responsible for coordinating
5 field efforts for the wetland delineations and habitat assessments, reviewing the Ecological
6 Assessment ("EA"), and providing coordination between National Grid Renewables and
7 Environmental Design & Research, Landscape Architecture, Engineering &
8 Environmental Services, D.P.C., for the Project Application. I was responsible for the
9 quality control of Cardno's work for the Project. I also support several other renewable
10 energy (both solar and wind) projects in the Midwestern and Eastern states, and manage
11 Clean Water Act compliance projects for industrial clients in the Northeast.

12 **Q.3. What is your educational and professional background?**

13 **A.3.** I earned a Bachelor of Science degree in biological oceanography from Millersville
14 University in 2000. I have over 17 years of professional environmental experience which
15 encompasses environmental permitting, ecological and water resources studies, and project
16 management. My areas of expertise include renewable energy, siting and licensing, water
17 resources, fisheries, habitat and wildlife valuation/identification, and soil/sediment
18 evaluation. I have designed, implemented, and/or managed numerous sampling and
19 monitoring programs, including field resource surveys (e.g., wetlands, RTE species
20 habitat), benthic sampling studies, fish sampling studies, sediment characterization studies,
21 aquatic remote sensing/geophysical surveys, and cultural resource studies. Prior to
22 working at Cardno for the past 14 years, I worked for the URS Corporation for over two
23 years in the Water Resources group, where I was primarily involved in permitting and

1 compliance for the power/energy industry under the Clean Water Act, Sections 316(a) and
2 (b), Section 401, and Section 402. I also worked for the U.S. Environmental Protection
3 Agency onboard the ocean survey vessel *Peter W. Anderson*, conducting geophysical
4 surveys of the ocean floor, channel dredging monitoring, reef monitoring, water quality
5 and fishery surveys, as well as criminal investigations.

6 **Q.4. On whose behalf are you offering testimony?**

7 **A.4.** I am testifying on behalf of the Applicant, Ross County Solar, LLC (“Applicant”),
8 in support of its Application filed in Case No. 20-1380-EL-BGN.

9 **Q.5. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

10 **A.5.** The purpose of my testimony is to describe studies my firm undertook on behalf of
11 the Applicant, to summarize the results of those studies, and to summarize the permits that
12 the Applicant expects to obtain prior to initiating construction in or near surface waters. I
13 will also provide my overall assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the
14 Project.

15 **Q.6. Please describe the studies that you and your firm undertook on behalf of the**
16 **Applicant.**

17 **A.6.** Cardno developed an EA on behalf of the Applicant, which was attached to the
18 Application as Exhibit S. The EA evaluated and summarized potential land use impacts,
19 based on a desktop assessment and on-site field studies of ecological resources. The
20 purpose of the EA was to provide a stream and wetland delineation map and characterize
21 ecological communities; and screen for potential occurrences of RTE species within the
22 area that the Project infrastructure (including solar panels, access roads, collections, lines,
23 inverters, etc.) will occupy (“Project Area”).

Q.7. What was your role in the studies conducted for the Application?

A.7. My role was to provide senior-level management of the studies including planning, scheduling, organizing, and overseeing the field and desktop investigations, to perform review and quality assurance on the study products (e.g., reports, figures, tables, and written analysis), and to provide communications with the Applicant regarding the studies' progress, results, and Project implications.

Q.8. What were Cardno's results from the assessment of endangered species in the Project Area?

A.8. Cardno's assessment did not identify any state- or federally-listed rare, threatened or endangered ("RTE") plant or animal species in the Project Area. Based on a review of publicly available data, the Project Area identified in the Application and the surrounding area within a ¼-mile buffer are not expected to provide significant or permanent habitat for any listed or other RTE species. During Cardno's Spring 2020 field surveys, no RTE species were identified. Cardno's studies found no RTE species and limited potential for RTE species habitat within the Project Area (1,440 acres). The Project was designed to minimize impacts to potential RTE species habitat, so the current disturbance area of approximately 925 acres avoids most of the potential RTE species habitat within the greater Project Area. The planned area of disturbance has very limited potential RTE habitat as it is primarily comprised of active agricultural fields. As an additional protective measure, the Applicant is implementing avoidance measures. Such measures include minimizing habitat fragmentation, siting infrastructure in uplands rather than wetlands, and minimizing perennial stream crossings. The Applicant plans to adhere to time-of-year ("TOY") restrictions for construction activities, such as limiting the tree clearing (approximately 1

1 acre spread across the 1,440 acres Project Area) between October and March in order to
2 assure no potential impacts to migrating listed bats. If clearing efforts cannot be completed
3 between October-March for any reason, the Applicant will consult with the U.S. Fish and
4 Wildlife Service (“USFWS”) and/or Ohio Department of Natural Resources (“ODNR”)
5 prior to clearing activities. The Applicant will also adhere to TOY restrictions for
6 construction within potential nesting habitat for the upland sandpiper and/or northern
7 harrier. While potential nesting habitat for both species is limited within the Project Area,
8 site preparation and/or mowing to reduce vegetation height within pastureland (which can
9 sometimes be of suitable condition for these nesting birds) outside of those species nesting
10 dates would preclude any vegetated areas as suitable nesting habitat, and adequately
11 discourage nesting of those species during construction activities. The Applicant also may
12 consult with the USFWS and/or ODNR to identify an alternative course of action, if
13 necessary.

14 Based on current Project designs (which include the measures I reference), significant
15 impacts to these areas are not anticipated as the area of disturbance is primarily active
16 agricultural fields, and therefore, no post-construction wildlife monitoring is proposed at
17 this time.

18 **Q.9. Did you make any findings or observations relating to any aquatic resources?**

19 **A.9.** Yes. A total of thirty-eight wetlands and sixty streams were identified during field
20 surveys. A total of 6.80 acres of wetlands were identified within the Project Area. Twenty-
21 three wetlands (approximately 5.34 acres) were identified as palustrine emergent, and
22 fifteen wetlands (approximately 1.44 acres) were identified as palustrine forested. Based
23 on the preliminary facility layout provided by the Applicant, less than 0.04 acres of wetland

1 will be temporarily impacted during construction, and less than 0.02 acres of wetland will
2 be permanently impacted during operation. The majority of the wetlands were classified
3 as Category 1 and Category 2 and scored as low quality and good quality wetlands, utilizing
4 the Ohio Rapid Assessment Methodology, which was developed to determine the
5 ecological quality and level of function of a particular wetland in order to meet the
6 requirements under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act.

7 Sixty waterbodies (streams, and ditches) were delineated within the Project Area, totaling
8 47,863 linear feet of waterway. The waterbodies observed were mostly National
9 Hydrography Dataset stream features (i.e., unnamed tributaries of Scioto River). Impacts
10 to these features are associated with a proposed access road crossing of less than 0.021
11 acres, and an underground collection line crossing. Due to the modification and
12 disturbance present in the surrounding land cover (predominantly agriculture), the
13 waterbodies identified in the Project Area are unlikely to support significant aquatic
14 communities.

15 During the field surveys, the Cardno team also surveyed for the presence or absence of
16 freshwater mussels within the field-delineated streams. None of the delineated waterbodies
17 were identified as potentially providing a habitat for RTE mussel species. Additionally,
18 the streams and ditches present in the Project Area typically exhibit maintained stream
19 banks that are unlikely to provide suitable habitat for rare fish and freshwater mussels.
20 Mussels prefer streams with forested buffer areas and well-developed banks that provide
21 locations for the mussels to adhere to. No mussel populations were observed in the streams
22 identified by Cardno.

23 **Q.10. Did you make any findings or observations related to birds or other wildlife?**

1 **A.10.** Yes. We found that the Project would not significantly impact birds or other
2 wildlife, or bird/wildlife habitat. The Project has been intentionally sited to avoid and/or
3 minimize impacts to wildlife by locating the majority of infrastructure within active
4 agricultural land, which only provides habitat to a limited number of wildlife species. The
5 few birds and mammals that may forage within these fields would likely avoid the areas
6 that are being disturbed by construction. On a landscape scale, there is abundant
7 availability of similar agricultural fields within the Project Area and surrounding area that
8 can be used as similar habitat. After construction the Project Area will be stabilized with
9 permanent vegetation that will provide potential forage habitat for area birds and wildlife.
10 In addition, the Project Area and ¼-mile buffer are not known to provide permanent habitat
11 for sensitive bird or bat species. Due to this lack of adequate habitat in the immediate
12 Project Area, it is likely many birds and other wildlife will opt for higher quality habitat
13 nearby, such as wildlife areas or state parks for roosting, foraging, and breeding.

14 **Q.11. What is your overall assessment of the potential environmental impacts of the**
15 **Project?**

16 **A.11.** Overall, the Project will have very limited environmental impacts. The Project is
17 proposed to be primarily built on land that has already been disturbed seasonally/annually
18 for agriculture with limited identified habitat of significant value to RTE species and other
19 wildlife. The Project's most significant impact will come from the conversion of land used
20 for agriculture to land used for the solar panel arrays and associated infrastructure for the
21 life of the Project. The Applicant has designed the Project to avoid and minimize impacts
22 to wetlands, waterbodies, woodlots, and aquatic and terrestrial wildlife species.

23 **Q.12. Does this conclude your direct testimony?**

1 **A.12.** Yes, it does.

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

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Summary: Testimony Direct Testimony of Ryan Rupprecht electronically filed by Ms. Anna Sanyal on behalf of Ross County Solar, LLC