

Case ID - Case Name: 20-1380-EL-BGN - Ross County Solar
Company Name: Ross County Solar, LLC
Case Status: Under Construction
Certificate Approved Date: October 21, 2021
Construction Start Date: March 14, 2023
Case Type: Solar Generation
Capacity, Acreage: 120.0 MW, 1400 acres
County(s): Ross
Township(s): Buckskin, Paint
Report Number: CI23-20-1380-001

Background

On October 21, 2021, the Ohio Power Siting Board (Board) issued a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need (Certificate) to Ross County Solar, LLC (RCS or Certificate Holder) in Case No. 20-1380-EL-BGN for the construction, operation, and maintenance of a 120 megawatt (MW) solar-powered electric generation facility (Project), subject to the conditions set forth in the Stipulation and consistent with the Opinion, Order, and Certificate. RCS approximately 1,400 acres located in Buckskin and Paint townships in Ross County. The project is currently owned by National Grid Renewables (NGR). Construction began on March 14, 2023, and is still ongoing, as of the date of this report.

Summary

On the evening of April 17, 2023, NGR’s construction manager was notified by a landowner that some tree clearing was going to be undertaken the next day on a parcel leased by RCS. The following morning, the construction manager drove to the site and met with the NGR’s Associate Developer to determine if the trees to-be-cleared were part of the project footprint. It was confirmed the trees were part of the project footprint, and the logging crew was instructed to cease operations immediately.

On April 20, 2023, Ohio Power Siting Board Staff (Staff) was notified by Ross Solar’s legal representation that a landowner had allegedly cleared trees not authorized for removal within the project area. 0.5 to 1.5 acres of trees were reported to have been removed, and the operation was reportedly halted immediately upon the logging crew receiving notification to do so. On April 26, 2023, Staff conducted a site investigation. Staff was able to gather photographic evidence corroborating the Certificate Holder’s claim. Staff also gathered details by speaking directly with the landowner.

Through post-inspection data requests with NGR, Staff learned the affected stand of trees was intended to be used as vegetative screening for the project. This particular parcel is only being partially utilized by RCS, and as a result, is leased. In other areas of the project, parcels with vegetative screening have been purchased to mitigate similar issues.

As a resolution, NGR met with the landowner who was responsible for the tree clearing, walked through the site, and detailed what was under RCS’s control.

Recommendations

It is Staff's opinion that the tree clearing did not damage the effectiveness of the vegetative screening to a point which would warrant remediation. Staff also acknowledges the additional interaction and exchange of information with the landowner as sufficient mitigative action concerning the unauthorized tree clearing at RCS. Staff is satisfied with the resolution of this Compliance Inquiry and recommends no further action aside from maintaining strict adherence to the Certificate.

Eric Morrison

Public Utilities Commission of Ohio
Power Siting Department
Field Compliance Investigator

EC:

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Case No(s). 20-1380-EL-BGN

Summary: Report documenting tree clearing compliance inquiry. electronically filed
by Eric R Morrison on behalf of OPSB Staff.