

Disease Diagnostics Laboratory in Pullman, Washington, to be screened for a number of pathogens, including *Mycoplasma ovipneumoniae* (*M. ovi*), a bacterium known to be associated with acute pneumonia mortality events. However, *M. ovi* was not detected in any of the samples, and there does not appear to be a clear association of the population decline with respiratory disease or other common diseases. Since January 2019, eight of 19 radio-collared sheep have died; six because of mountain lion predation, one killed legally by a hunter, and one from unknown causes.

Given rapidly declining sheep numbers and 2 years of poor lamb recruitment, the herd is at risk of extirpation from the refuge in the next few years unless appropriate management actions are taken. In response, ODFW suspended sheep hunting on the Refuge following the 2019 hunting season. Because there is considerable uncertainty about what the proximate and ultimate causes of this decline are, development of a management plan and EIS are warranted in order to analyze existing data and identify short- and long-term alternatives and actions needed to restore the bighorn sheep herd to a self-sustaining population level. Possible management actions include continued monitoring, management of the sheep and associated predator populations, and restoration and maintenance of habitat.

Preliminary Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

Based on the fundamental principles of wildlife management, we have identified the following preliminary issues, concerns, and opportunities regarding the sheep population that we may address in the plan. Additional issues may be identified during the public scoping process.

- *Bighorn sheep population objectives.* What parameters should the Service use to define a self-sustainable population on the refuge? What criteria or triggers should the Service consider when deciding to implement or suspend management actions?

- *Bighorn sheep survival and mortality.* What actions can the Service take to improve sheep survival and lamb recruitment? What are the effects of the various sources of mortality—including disease, predation, and hunting—on the long-term viability of the sheep population? Given risks of disease introductions, is there a role for augmenting the sheep population?

- *Habitat quality and quantity.* What actions can the Service take to maintain

and restore sheep habitat? How are western juniper expansion and invasive plant species (invasive annual grasses including cheatgrass) affecting the sheep population? Is there a role for prescribed fire to manage sheep habitats? Is natural water availability a limiting resource?

- *Potential alternatives and environmental analysis.* Potential alternatives include a focus on habitat, a focus on population management, or a combination of approaches. What alternatives for restoring the bighorn sheep population should the Service explore? Which components of the human environment should the Service emphasize in the environmental analysis?

Public Availability of Comments

All comments received from individuals become part of the official public record. We will handle all requests for such comments in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and the CEQ's NEPA regulations at 40 CFR 1506.6(f). The Service's practice is to make comments, including names and home addresses of respondents, available for public review during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that we withhold their home address from the record, which we will honor to the extent allowable by law. If you wish us to withhold your name and/or address, you must state this prominently at the beginning of your comments.

Charles Stenvall,

Acting Regional Refuge Chief, Pacific Region, Portland, Oregon.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Indian Affairs

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Notice of Intent To Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Southern Bighorn Solar Project on the Moapa River Indian Reservation, Clark County, Nevada

AGENCY: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of intent.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as lead agency, in cooperation with the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians (Moapa Band), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and other agencies, intend to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will evaluate a photovoltaic (PV) solar

energy generation and storage projects on the Moapa River Indian Reservation (Reservation) and collector lines and access roads located on the Reservation, Reservation lands administered by BLM, and BLM lands. This notice announces the beginning of the scoping process to solicit public comments and identify potential issues related to the EIS. It also announces that two live streaming events will be held where the project team will introduce the project and be available by internet and by phone to document and discuss potential issues, alternatives, and mitigation to be considered in the EIS.

DATES: Written comments on the scope of the EIS or implementation of the proposal must arrive by 11:59 p.m. on June 8, 2020. The dates and times of the virtual public scoping meetings will be published in the *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and *Moapa Valley Progress* 15 days before the scoping meetings.

ADDRESSES: You may mail, email, or hand carry written comments to Mr. Chip Lewis, BIA Western Regional Office, 2600 North Central Avenue, 4th Floor Mailroom, Phoenix, Arizona 85004; telephone: (602) 379-6750; email: Chip.Lewis@bia.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Federal action, taken under 25 U.S.C. 415, is the BIA's approval of two solar energy ground leases and associated agreements entered into by the Moapa Band with 300MS 8me LLC and 425LM 8me LLC (Applicants), both subsidiaries of 8minute Solar Energy. The agreements provide for construction, operation and maintenance (O&M), and eventual decommissioning of the PV electricity generation and battery storage facilities located entirely on the Reservation, in Clark County Nevada. The PV electricity generation and battery storage facilities would be located on up to 3,600 acres of tribal trust land and would have a combined capacity of up to 400 megawatts alternating current (MWac)—300 MWac for one project/phase, and 100 MWac for a second project/phase. Collector lines and access roads required for interconnection of the solar projects would be located on the Reservation, Reservation lands administered by the BLM, and BLM lands. Together, the proposed solar energy generation and storage facilities, collector lines, and other associated facilities will make up the two projects/phases of the Southern Bighorn Solar Project (SBSP). The proposed SBSP would require the BIA to approve a business lease and for both the BIA and the BLM to approve and authorize

rights-of-way (ROWs) for the electrical collector lines and access roads.

The SBSP would be constructed on up to 3,600 acres located within a 6,308-acre lease option area in Township (T) 16 South (S), Range (R) 64 East (E) that includes all or parts of Sections 12–14, 22–27, and 33–36; T16S R65E Sections 4–9, 16–18, 30, and 31; and T17S R64E Sections 10–12, Mount Diablo Baseline and Meridian, Nevada. Primary access to the Project would be provided by I–15, North Las Vegas Boulevard, and an existing improved access road on Reservation lands, Reservation lands administered by the BLM, and BLM lands. The overhead collector lines would connect the solar projects to the substation(s) within the boundaries of the previously approved Eagle Shadow Mountain Solar Project. From there, the electricity generated would connect to the existing gen-tie line and be delivered to the regional electrical grid at NV Energy's Reid Gardner Substation.

Construction of the 300MWac project/phase is expected to take approximately 14–16 months, and construction of the up to 100MWac project/phase is expected to take approximately 8–10 months. The two projects/phases may be constructed simultaneously or sequentially. The electricity generation and storage facilities are expected to be operated for up to 40 years under the terms of the leases. Major onsite facilities include multiple blocks of solar PV panels mounted on fixed tilt or tracking systems, pad mounted inverters and transformers, collector lines, up to 1,000 MW-hours of battery storage, access roads, and O&M facilities. Water will be needed during construction for dust control and a minimal amount will be needed during operations for administrative and sanitary water use and for panel washing. The water supply required for the Project would be leased from the Moapa Band.

The purposes of the proposed Project are, among other things, to: (1) Provide a long-term, diverse, and viable economic revenue base and job opportunities for the Moapa Band; (2) assist Nevada and neighboring states to meet their State renewable energy needs; and (3) allow the Moapa Band, in partnership with the Applicant, to optimize the use of the lease site while maximizing the potential economic benefit to the Tribe.

BIA will prepare the EIS in cooperation with the Moapa Band, BLM, Environmental Protection Agency, and possibly Nevada Department of Wildlife. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and National Park Service will provide input on the analysis. The resulting EIS will aim to

(1) provide agency decision makers, the Moapa Band, and the general public with a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the proposed Project and alternatives on the Reservation; (2) describe the cumulative impacts of increased development on the Reservation; and (3) identify and propose mitigation measures that would minimize or prevent significant adverse impacts. Consistent with these objectives, the EIS will analyze the proposed Project and appurtenant features, viable alternatives, and the No Action alternative. Other alternatives may be identified in response to issues raised during the scoping process.

The EIS will provide a framework for BIA and BLM to make determinations and to decide whether to take the aforementioned Federal actions. In addition, BIA will use and coordinate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) commenting process to satisfy its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (16 U.S.C. 470f) as provided for in 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3). Native American tribal consultations will be conducted in accordance with policy, and tribal concerns will be given due consideration, including impacts on Indian trust assets. Other federal agencies may rely on the EIS to make decisions under their authority and the Moapa Band may also use the EIS to make decisions under their Tribal Environmental Policy Ordinance. USFWS will review the EIS for consistency with the Endangered Species Act, as amended, and other implementing acts, and may rely on the EIS to support its decisions and opinions regarding the Project.

Issues to be addressed in the EIS analysis may include, but would not be limited to, Project impacts on water resources, biological resources, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, Native American religious concerns, and aesthetics. In addition to those resource topics identified above, Federal, State, and local agencies, along with other stakeholders that may be interested or affected by the BIA's decision on the proposed Project, are invited to participate in the scoping process to identify additional issues to be addressed.

Submission of Public Comments

Please include your name, return address, and the caption "EIS, Southern Bighorn Solar Project," on the first page of any written comments. You may also submit comments verbally during one of the virtual public scoping meeting presentations or provide written

comments to the address listed above in the **ADDRESSES** section.

Public scoping meetings will be held to further describe the Project and identify potential issues and alternatives to be considered in the EIS. To help protect the public and limit the spread of the COVID–19 virus, virtual public meetings will be held, where a short presentation will be made and team members present to discuss and answer questions. The PowerPoint presentation will be posted to the project website prior to the virtual meetings. Those who cannot live stream the presentation would be able to access the meeting presentation and could join by telephone. Additionally, the live presentation will be recorded and made accessible for viewing throughout the scoping period. The first public scoping meeting will be held in the afternoon by video and telephone conference and the second public scoping meeting will be held in the evening by video and telephone conference. The dates and times of the public scoping meetings will be included in notices to be published in the, *Las Vegas Review-Journal* and *Moapa Valley Progress* 15 days before the meetings.

Public Comment Availability

Comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the mailing address shown in the **ADDRESSES** section during regular business hours, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time.

Authority

This notice is published in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7 of the Council of Environmental Quality regulations and 43 CFR 46.235 of the Department of the Interior Regulations implementing the procedural requirements of the NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), and in accordance with the exercise of authority delegated to the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs by part 209 of the Department Manual.

Tara Sweeney,

Assistant Secretary—Indian Affairs.

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