



National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Determination Categorical Exclusion

Recipient: Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB)

State: Alaska

Project Title: Solar PV, Battery Storage, and Heat Pumps for Northwest Arctic Alaska – Village of Selawik (Solar/BESS)

Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) Number: DE-FOA-0002970

Award Number: DE-CD0000070

OCED NEPA Control Number: OCED-00070-001-CX

Categorical Exclusion Appendix, Number, and Description:

B5.16 Solar photovoltaic systems The installation, modification, operation, and removal of commercially available solar photovoltaic systems located on a building or other structure (such as rooftop, parking lot or facility, and mounted to signage, lighting, gates, or fences), or if located on land, generally comprising less than 10 acres within a previously disturbed or developed area. Covered actions would be in accordance with applicable requirements (such as local land use and zoning requirements) in the proposed project area and would incorporate appropriate control technologies and best management practices.

B4.14 Construction and operation of electrochemical-battery or flywheel energy storage systems

Construction, operation, upgrade, or decommissioning of an electrochemical-battery or flywheel energy storage system within a previously disturbed or developed area or within a small (as discussed at 10 CFR 1021.410(g)(2)) area contiguous to a previously disturbed or developed area. Covered actions would be in accordance with applicable requirements (such as land use and zoning requirements) in the proposed project area and the integral elements listed at the start of appendix B of this part, and would incorporate appropriate safety standards (including the current National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 855, Standard for the Installation of Energy Storage Systems), design and construction standards, control technologies, and best management practices.

Rationale for determination: DOE's Office of Clean Energy Demonstrations (OCED) is proposing to provide funding to Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) in support of their project to execute 11 subprojects under this award. These subprojects are generally classified as Solar Photovoltaic (PV), Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), powerplant upgrades, transmission line upgrades and installation of heat pumps into residential dwellings. This CX determination applies to the Solar PV/BESS installation in the Native Village of Selawik, Alaska.

The project site for the battery storage consists of approximately 0.91 acres of City of Selawik owned land. The parcel has a gravel pad with a fence enclosure and is adjacent to the power plant. The project site for the solar PV array consists of approximately 7.39 acres of Alaska Village Electric Cooperative (AVEC) owned land. The parcel is mostly tundra with patches of low brush, and it is adjacent to the bulk fuel storage and the powerplant. The solar array would consist of 520-watt bifacial solar modules (or similar) positioned in 3 sub-arrays facing south, southeast, and southwest, each consisting of 3-4 rows of modules arranged 2-modules high for a total of approximately 1,366 modules. A perimeter chain link fence would be constructed around the solar array. A single trench would allow for buried conductors using 2" HDPE interdict leading to the old wind turbine equipment building where the inverters would be housed. Ground disturbance would be limited to the proposed fenced area, estimated at 7.39 acres. At the battery site, (2) 20-foot containers along with a small power skid would be located on the gravel pad with conductors routed underground in shallow trenching to the nearby existing power pole.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) completed a Categorical Exclusion (1970.54 with conditions) for their activities on the Selawik project under the Rural Energy for America Program Renewable Energy Systems and Energy Efficiency Grant. The conditions include those from the Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation and are that: (1) vegetation clearing will be conducted outside of the eider breeding and nesting season (May to September); (2) the installation of ground screws would begin in March and to the maximum extent practicable avoid the Steller's eider nesting season. Any impacted soil will be seeded with native seed mixes after construction; and (3) the new power line installed for this project will be fitted with bird flight diverters supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. DOE has incorporated by reference USDA's findings and consultations.

NAB has confirmed that the selected BESS will comply with all state and federal fire standards, including NFPA and all relevant fire codes.

DOE does not anticipate adverse impacts to sensitive resources as a result of the proposed activities.

Related regulatory requirements: The proposed project covers the same project area as that analyzed by the USDA therefore DOE is relying on the existing consultation completed on the project for Section 106 National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and Section 7 Endangered Species Act (ESA). USDA received concurrence on no historic properties affected from the AK State Historic Preservation Office on November 14, 2024, no further consultation is required. USDA received concurrence through informal consultation with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on a may affect, not likely to adversely affect for the threatened polar bear (*Ursus maritimus*), wood bison (*Bison bison athabasca*), and Steller's eider (*Polysticta stelleri*), as well as critical habitat for the polar bear.

Signature of this Categorical Exclusion determination affirms that:

The proposed action (or the part of the proposal described in ‘rationale for determination’) fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D. To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not:

- (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders;
- (2) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities;
- (3) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases;
- (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B (4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B;
- (5) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements, such as those listed in paragraph B (5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. The proposed action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

This proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts, is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts, and is not precluded by any applicable regulation concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Any work to be carried out outside of the United States, its territories and possessions is exempt from further review pursuant to Section 5.1.1 of the DOE Final Guidelines for Implementation of Executive Order 12114; “Environmental Effects Abroad of Major Federal Actions.”

Conditions:

1. If the Recipient proposes to add to or modify the activities or locations described herein, those new activities/locations will be subject to additional NEPA review.
2. All required permits and approvals must be obtained before work can begin and all work must be completed in accordance with all required permits and approvals.
3. All cultural resource identification activities (e.g., archaeological, historic above ground, historic visual assessments) must be completed in accordance with applicable guidelines and standards provided by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) or Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) and the Secretary of the Interior's Identification Standards. Coordination with DOE is required to establish an Area of Potential Effects (APE) and scope of effort (i.e., research design) prior to geotechnical surveys and cultural resource field investigations. DOE will initiate Section 106 consultation prior to any geotechnical surveys and cultural resource field investigations in order to support coordination with SHPO/THPO, Tribes, and other Section 106 consulting parties.

Signature of this memorandum constitutes a record of this decision.

OCED NEPA Compliance Officer Signature:

Date: