

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL
ASSESSMENT FOR THE NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH HIGH PENETRATION
SOLAR AND BATTERY ENERGY PROJECT, AMBLER, ALASKA (DOE/EA-2302)**

U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has prepared the *Environmental Assessment for the Northwest Arctic Borough High Penetration Solar and Battery Energy Project, Ambler, Alaska* (DOE/EA-2302) [referred to as the EA and is incorporated by reference into this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)], which analyzed the potential impacts of the Proposed Action. DOE's Proposed Action is to authorize the expenditure of federal funds by Northwest Arctic Borough (NAB) to construct and operate a solar photovoltaic (PV) array and battery energy storage system (BESS) to support the village of Ambler, Alaska (AK).

The NAB High Penetration Solar and BESS Project was competitively selected for a DOE financial assistance award under the "Energy Improvements in Rural or Remote Areas Program" funding opportunities, DE-FOA-0003045 and 0002970. The Project and awards would assist with deploying and integrating high-penetration solar PV and BESS into an existing microgrid in the remote tribal community of Ambler, which currently is relying on diesel for 100 percent of their electrical production. This EA was prepared pursuant to National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and covers the activities planned for the village of Ambler, AK.

The EA evaluated two alternatives to address NAB's request for financial assistance to construct and operate a solar PV array and BESS to support the village of Ambler, AK. The two alternatives are: a No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action to provide federal funding in support of the solar PV and BESS installations. The Proposed Action is the Preferred Alternative; it would meet the purpose and need for the Proposed Action and would also be protective of human health and the environment.

Based on the analysis in the EA, DOE determined that the Preferred Alternative would not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of human health and the environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required, and DOE is selecting the Proposed Action and issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

PROPOSED ACTION: The Proposed Action involves providing federal funds in support of construction and operation of solar PV and BESS for the village of Ambler (the Proposed Project). Under the Proposed Action, NAB would clear up to eight acres of land and site preparation for the PV racking foundation and an equipment pad. The BESS building would house batteries and be co-located with the existing power plants. At completion of the project, ownership of the solar PV array would be transferred to the Tribe, allowing the Tribe to become an independent power producer and sell power to the local utility under a power purchase agreement, thereby owning and controlling the benefits of the solar resource and solar PV infrastructure on their land.

ALTERNATIVES EVALUATED: DOE evaluated two alternatives in the EA. Under the No-Action Alternative, DOE would not authorize the expenditure of federal funds by NAB in support of the Proposed Project. For purposes of analysis, DOE assumed the Proposed Project would not proceed if DOE does not authorize the expenditure of federal funds. The No Action Alternative was evaluated to provide a baseline for comparison with the Proposed Action Alternative, which is the Preferred Alternative. The Proposed Action (the Preferred Alternative) consists of authorizing the expenditure of federal funding by NAB to support the solar PV and BESS for the village of Ambler.

No alternatives were considered but eliminated for further analysis, see Section 2.3 of the EA.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: The affected environment for the following resources at the project site were evaluated for potential impacts from the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action (the Preferred Alternative):

- Wildlife and Habitat
- Cultural Resources
- Air Quality
- Noise and Vibration

Under the No-Action Alternative, the solar PV and BESS would not be constructed, and all resources areas would remain unchanged when compared to existing conditions.

The Proposed Action (the Preferred Alternative) would have short and long-term, negligible to minor impacts to resources from construction and operation activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Summary of Impacts

Resource Area	Level of Expected Impact
Wildlife and Habitat	Negligible to Minor, Short-term and Long-term impacts
Cultural Resources	Negligible, Long-term impacts
Air Quality	Negligible to Minor, Short-term impacts
Noise and Vibration	Minor to moderate, Short-term impacts

Applicant committed measures are listed in Section 2.7 of the EA and include items to reduce potential impacts from the Proposed Project. Measures cover the following resource areas: infrastructure, traffic and transportation; biological resources; noise and vibration; and hydrology.

CONSULTATIONS: DOE made a determination of *no effect* for threatened and endangered species under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. On January 13, 2025, DOE received concurrence from Alaska State Historic Preservation Office (AK SHPO) with a *no historic properties affected* finding for the Proposed Action following a 30-day review period under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). DOE did not receive any comments from consulting parties.

COOPERATING AGENCIES: DOE did not invite any federal agencies or Tribes to be cooperating agencies for this project.

CERTIFICATIONS: DOE certifies that the agency has considered the factors mandated by NEPA; that the environmental assessment represents DOE's good-faith effort to prioritize documentation of the most important considerations required by the statute within the Congressionally mandated page limits; that this prioritization reflects DOE's expert judgment; and that any considerations addressed briefly or left unaddressed were, in DOE's judgment, comparatively not of a substantive nature that meaningfully informed the consideration of environmental effects and the resulting decision.

DOE certifies that the resulting environmental assessment represents DOE's good-faith effort to fulfill NEPA's requirements within the Congressional timeline; that such effort is substantially complete; that, in DOE's expert opinion, the analysis contained therein is adequate to inform and reasonably explain DOE's decision regarding the proposed action.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY AND CONTACT INFORMATION: This FONSI and EA are available at the following website: <https://www.energy.gov/nepa/doe-environmental-assessments>

For more information about this FONSI or EA:

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DETERMINATION: Based on the information and analysis in the EA, DOE has determined that the Proposed Action would not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of human health or the environment in accordance with NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq and any relevant implementing regulations. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not required.

DOE selects the Proposed Action from the *Environmental Assessment for the Northwest Arctic Borough High Penetration Solar and Battery Energy Project, Ambler, Alaska* (DOE/EA-2302) and is issuing this FONSI.

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