



ENVIRONMENTAL & STATISTICAL CONSULTANTS

408 West 6th Street, Bloomington, IN 47404
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BLACK DIAMOND SOLAR PROJECT

Agency Coordination Meeting with USFWS
September 26, 2019

ATTENDEES

- Travis Brown (WEST)
- Meredith Rodriguez (WEST)
- Rhett Good (WEST)
- Stephanie Fowler (Swift Current Energy)
- Daniel Sheehan (Swift Current Energy)
- Tyler Porter (USFWS)
- Ryan Anthony (USFWS)

MEETING OBJECTIVE

WEST and Swift Current Energy attended a webinar with USFWS to discuss the Black Diamond Solar Project in Christian County, Illinois. The primary intent of the meeting was to introduce the Project, wildlife studies done to date, proposed future studies, and discuss any questions or concerns the USFWS has for the Project.

MINUTES

1. Company and Project Introduction
 - a. Swift Current Energy has developed projects in Maine, Ohio, Illinois, Texas, Louisiana, and is currently working on a project in Kentucky.
 - b. The Black Diamond Solar Project is in Christian County, 14 miles southeast of Springfield, and is proposed to be up to 299MW, with a proposed construction start date of October 2021 and proposed COD of June 2022.
 - c. Land cover is predominantly cultivated crops, 2.4% deciduous forest and <0.1% woody wetland and open water.
2. Record Searches
 - a. WEST completed a USFWS records request; USFWS did not have records of any T&E species occurring within the Project or the Project vicinity
 - b. USFWS did note potential for Indiana bat, northern long-eared bat, eastern prairie fringed orchid, and bald eagle to occur. IPAC results returned four additional birds of conservation concern with potential to occur in the Project.
 - c. WEST completed a formal EcoCAT consultation for the Project and in-person meeting with IDNR, which returned records of Kirtland's snake in the project vicinity
3. Summary of Land Cover Mapping
 - a. WEST completed land cover and wetland dashboard mapping of the Project in 2019.
 - b. WEST determined that the project is majority cultivated crop, with a small amount of bottomland forest, non-native grassland, agricultural swales, and wetlands.



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3. Breeding Bird Surveys

- a. Breeding bird surveys were conducted between May and July of 2019 at 13 sampling points.
- b. Two observations each were made of bald eagle, black-crowned night-heron, upland sandpiper and black-billed cuckoo, mostly in association with the riparian areas bordering the northern portion of the Project site.

4. General Discussion and Questions

a. Tree Clearing

- i. USFWS inquired if any tree clearing would be done in association with the Project.
- ii. Swift Current confirmed that no tree clearing is anticipated, just a small amount of scrub clearing is expected.

b. Panel and Solar Design

- i. USFWS asked if the proposed solar panel surface was known.
- ii. Swift Current stated that the brand has not been solidified yet, but they can share that information when it is selected.

c. Eagles, Nesting Birds, and Bats

- i. USFWS noted that an eagle disturbance permit may be needed if work occurs during nesting season.
- ii. WEST inquired if 660 feet was the correct buffer distance needed for eagle nests. USFWS noted that the buffer would depend on what activities were occurring and the proximity to the nest. If activities are proposed within 660 feet, they suggested a permit would be needed. USFWS would like to discuss potential for impacts on nests further than 660 feet as well.
- iii. USFWS noted they haven't seen take associated with solar in Illinois, and eagle nest surveys and breeding bird surveys should be sufficient to examine potential risk.
- iv. USFWS recommended a year or two of post-construction monitoring surveys to see if anything of concern is occurring. USFWS noted that the M-opinion could change in the future.
- v. USFWS noted that the potential for impacts could be minimized through panel design. Lines or other patterns on the panels may reduce the likelihood that a panel could be mistaken for a water surface.
- vi. USFWS noted that they did not foresee any impacts to bats because tree clearing would be avoided. USFWS originally recommend season long bat monitoring in e-mail correspondence. During the meeting USFWS stated that monitoring for bats would not be necessary if potential habitat is not impacted.
- vii. USFWS originally recommend eagle use surveys in e-mail correspondence. During the meeting the USFWS acknowledged the proposed project area is primarily agriculture and does not provide suitable eagle foraging areas, and eagle use surveys were not needed. USFWS did recommend eagle nest surveys to avoid potential impacts to nesting eagles.

d. Vegetation Management

- i. USFWS asked if Swift Current had plans for vegetation around the solar array. Swift Current noted that IDNR has a pollinator friendly plan that Swift Current will be looking at.



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- ii. WEST noted that the eastern prairie fringed orchid came up in IPaC, but the habitat didn't look suitable. USFWS stated there were no records in the county, and presence of the species was unlikely.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Swift Current to provide panel design to USFWS.
2. Swift Current will confer with USFWS about any active eagle nests prior to construction.