



**UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
REGION 4  
ATLANTA FEDERAL CENTER  
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ATLANTA, GEORGIA 30303-8960

March 15, 2021

Elizabeth Smith  
NEPA Specialist  
Tennessee Valley Authority  
400 West Summit Hill Drive, WT11B  
Knoxville, Tennessee 37902

Re: EPA Comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Tennessee Valley Authority North Alabama Utility-Scale Solar Facility; CEQ Number: 20210011

Dear Ms. Smith:

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the referenced document in accordance with Section 309 of the Clean Air Act and Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The purpose of the DEIS is to examine the potential environmental effects associated with constructing, operating, maintaining, and decommissioning a solar Photovoltaic (PV) facility. Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) plans to purchase a 2,896-acre property located in Lawrence County, Alabama to expand its solar generating capacity.

The DEIS examines the No Action Alternative and the Proposed Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, TVA would not execute the purchase of the property using a Purchase Option Agreement and would not develop a solar PV facility. Maintenance of the existing transmission lines would continue to occur in the absence of the project. With the Proposed Action Alternative, TVA would construct a 200-megawatt (MW) alternating current (AC) solar PV facility, including an electrical substation and possibly a battery energy storage system, on a 1,459-acre portion of the Project Site. An additional 150 acres of the Project Site would be maintained as species-rich native plant meadow. The proposed project would connect to the existing adjacent Wilson Hydroelectric Plant (HP)– Mountain Home 161-kilovolt (kV) transmission line (TL) and require upgrades on this TL and the Mountain Home–Trinity 161-kV TL, extending into Morgan County, Alabama.

The DEIS indicates that the Project Site will be developed with the intent of entering into a power purchase agreement (PPA) between TVA and a qualified company to own, maintain, and operate the facility for up to a 20-year period. At the end of the PPA term, TVA would repurchase the property and allow the PPA to expire and decommission the facility or, as evaluated under separate environmental review, enter into a new PPA or choose to operate the solar PV facility for an additional period.

The EPA understands that TVA's preferred alternative is the Proposed Action Alternative. The EPA has not identified any significant environmental impacts to the proposed action that would require substantive changes to the DEIS or require the TVA's consideration of alternative locations for the

proposed solar PV facility. The EPA has enclosed detailed comments for your consideration (see enclosure).

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review the TVA's North Alabama Utility-Scale Solar Facility DEIS. If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Amanetta Somerville, of the NEPA Section at 404-562-9025 and via email at [somerville.amanetta@epa.gov](mailto:somerville.amanetta@epa.gov) or Mr. Larry Gissentanna, NEPA Project Manager at 404-562-8248 and via email at [gissentanna.larry@epa.gov](mailto:gissentanna.larry@epa.gov).

Sincerely,

*Ntale Kajumba* for

Mark J. Fite  
Director  
Strategic Programs Office

Enclosure

## Enclosure

### **EPA comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Tennessee Valley Authority North Alabama Utility-Scale Solar Facility; Lawrence County, Alabama. CEQ Number: 20210011**

**Background:** According to the DEIS, the preferred project alternative will require the clearing of 320 acres of forest. However, less than 10 acres of the forest is mature with well-developed canopy and an understory populated with mostly native plants. Additionally, 920 acres of forested land on the project site will not be cleared for the solar PV facility.

EPA notes that as a minimization effort and to promote environmental stewardship and pollinator habitat, TVA would also manage up to 150 acres of the Project Site as species-rich meadow. These restoration zones would be situated in areas that currently support croplands or in areas that were timbered in the past. In these areas, restoration sites would be seeded with up to 35 species of native grasses and wildflowers.

**Endangered Species:** Section 3.5.4 of the DEIS indicates that there is potentially suitable roosting habitat for endangered bat species within the project area, and all tree clearing would be limited to those times of the year when bats are not expected to be roosting in the area (from November 15 thru March 15). Due to the loss of potentially suitable foraging and roosting habitat for endangered bat species, Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife (FWS) will be required.

Recommendation: The EPA principally defers to the FWS regarding matters pertaining to compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The EPA recommends that any additional conservation measures identified by the FWS during consultation be included in the final EIS and/or record of decision.

**Wetlands:** Section 3.4.2 of the DEIS identified 125.41 wetland acres on the Project Site. The proposed solar PV array and associated infrastructure would only impact 0.07 acres of these delineated wetlands.

Recommendation: The EPA notes that the 0.07 acres of wetland impact are subject to regulatory oversight of the US Army Corps of Engineers, Nashville District, and the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. The EPA recommends any contractor working on-site use best management practices and address any potential impacts to off-site streams and waterways. The EPA also recommends that site grading, excavation, and construction plans should include implementable measures to prevent erosion and sediment runoff from the project site during and after construction.