Teanaway Solar Reserve Potential Visual Impact Assessment Kittitas County, Washington

Prepared for

Teanaway Solar Reserve, LLC

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Prepared by **CH2MHILL**



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1.0 Introduction

The purpose of this updated technical report is threefold: (1) provide updated background documentation for the conclusions presented in the Aesthetics section of the Expanded SEPA Checklist Supplement, (2) assist Kittitas County in evaluating the potential visual impacts associated with the proposed project, and (3) respond to the letter from Kittitas County to CH2M HILL dated December 4, 2009 regarding the Teanaway Solar Reserve Conditional Use Permit (CU-09-00005) and Development Agreement.

2.0 Methodology

The first step in evaluating the potential visual impacts associated with the proposed project was to determine areas from which the project could potentially be visible. To achieve this goal, a geographic information system (GIS)-based visibility assessment, called a Zone of Visual Influence (ZVI) analysis, was conducted. The layout of the project that provided the basis for the August 2009 ZVI analysis was updated to reflect the layout as of January 2010. Environmental Systems Research Institute (ESRI) ArcGIS software was used for the analysis. The ZVI data were overlaid on a map of the general proposed project area in order to graphically depict areas from which the project would be potentially visible. Figure 1 in Appendix A illustrates an updated conceptual layout of the project. Figure 2 in Appendix A illustrates the potential collective visibility of solar panels in all four areas of the project site. Four maps (see Appendix A, Figures 3 to 6) were developed to show the potential visibility of solar panels in each one of the four areas.

To respond to the letter from Kittitas County dated December 4, 2009, requesting additional analysis within 1 mile of the project, "close up" ZVI maps were developed to indicate the potential visibility of the project components. The potential visibility of solar collectors to areas within 2 miles of the potential project site was developed (see Appendix A, Figure 7). Additional ZVI maps were also developed to illustrate the potential view of the part of the existing BPA transmission line near the project site (see Appendix A, Figure 8) and the project transmission line (see Appendix A, Figure 9). For readers who are familiar with the project area, the BPA transmission line ZVI map is useful in terms of seeing how the "potential" visibility depicted in a ZVI map relates to what is actually seen. The last additional ZVI map that was developed was for the project substation (see Appendix A, Figure 10). The software that was used to produce the ZVI measured 10-meter digital elevation models that were derived from multiple sources. These sources consisted of 7.5' (1:24,000) U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) topographic quadrangle maps, elevation manuscripts, and aerial photographs. The elevation models represent ground elevations.

The ZVI model calculated lines of sight between points that represent solar panels 10 feet above the adjacent terrain and ground areas from which they would be potentially visible. The ZVI model that was developed for the substation calculated lines of sight between points that were 120 feet above adjacent terrain to depict the tallest structure at the substation, the A-frame dead-end structure that connects the substation with its transmission line (none of the other components in the substation is taller than 30 feet). The ZVI model that was developed for the existing BPA transmission line near the project site

and the proposed project transmission line tower (one) and poles (two) used points that were 150 feet above adjacent terrain.

It is important to realize that the models do not take into account the presence of trees, buildings, or other features, so in many areas where project visibility is indicated, views will actually be screened by trees, other vegetation, or other structures. The ZVI models "overstate" the potential visibility of the project because the presence of trees, other vegetation, and other structures within the potential "seen" areas that would block or screen views are not taken into account when demarking areas from which evaluated projects would potentially be visible. In addition, ZVI models are line-of-sight models that do not account for attenuating factors such as distance, haze, humidity, background landscape, or weather, which would make the project invisible or barely visible from certain locations under many atmospheric or weather conditions.

3.0 Project Viewpoints and Simulations

To respond to the December 4, 2009 letter from Kittitas County requesting additional analysis within 1 mile of the project area and to get a better idea of how visible the project would be, six new viewpoints (or locations) were added to the original four (see Appendix A, Figure 2). The 10 viewpoints represent locations from around the project area at varying distances. Photographs were taken from each location to depict existing views. Conceptual depictions or simulations of how the project would appear from eight of the locations were developed.

Viewpoints were also used to depict existing visual conditions in the general project area and how they might change if the project were constructed. Viewpoints 1 and 2 were chosen to represent views of the project from areas south of Interstate 90 (I-90). Viewpoint 1 is located alongside Watson Cutoff Road just below the intersection with Upper Peoh Point Road. It is approximately 4 miles southwest of the project. Viewpoint 2 is approximately 3.5 miles to the southwest of the project and is located on Watson Cutoff Road at a lower elevation than Viewpoint 1 and is approximately 0.2 mile south of I-90. Both of these viewpoints were identified in the ZVI maps to be within the "seen" area of the project. Figure 1a of Appendix B depicts the existing view towards the project from Viewpoint 1, and Figure 1b is a conceptual depiction of what the view might look like with the project in place. Figures 2a and 2b of Appendix B illustrate similar views and conceptual depictions from Viewpoint 2. The project would be noticeable to viewers from these areas. It would appear as a series of low-lying dark objects located along the forested ridge that includes the project site. The project would be noticeable as a non-timber land use, but would likely be difficult for most viewers to identify what it is at this distance. Due to the low-lying nature of the solar collectors, the project would not block of obscure views of the mountains behind the project site.

Viewpoints 3 and 4 are situated on Lookout Mountain south and southeast, respectively, of the project site. Despite much of the northwest side of Lookout Mountain being identified as an area from which the project would be potentially visible, it was difficult to find publically accessible locations on the northwest facing slopes of Lookout Mountain from which the project site can be seen. Based on several site visits and discussions with neighbors in the area on July 26, 2009, many, if not most, of the residences on the slopes of Lookout

Mountain have views toward the project site that are obscured or at least partially screened by trees. Two areas were found that did have views of the project area.

Viewpoint 3 is located on private property in a pasture above the main part of the ranch. It represents a very unobstructed and wide-open view of the project. Viewpoint 4 is located near the intersection of Ridgewater Drive and Lambert Road on public property. Both of these locations are approximately 1.5 miles from the closest edge of the project. These viewpoints were chosen to depict some of the closest elevated residential areas that could have views of the project. Figure 3a in Appendix B depicts the existing view from Viewpoint 3 looking toward the project area. Figure 3b is a conceptual depiction of what the view might look like if the project were constructed. Figures 4a and 4b in Appendix B illustrate similar views and conceptual depictions from Viewpoint 4.

The view from Viewpoint 3 would change considerably with the project (although views farther down the slope near the ranch house would change less due to a lower viewing angle and some vegetation that would somewhat screen views). Views from Viewpoint 4 would also change with the project but would not be as noticeable from Viewpoint 3 and would be of short durations as people drive on Ridgewater Drive.

Most residences on the north side of Highway 970 are closer to the project site than the residences on the northwest face of Lookout Mountain. However, none are higher in elevation than the project site and do not look down upon, or parallel to, it, so the project would not be a visible as it would from parts of Lookout Mountain. Four new viewpoints (5, 6, 7, and 10) within 1 mile of the project site were selected based upon the request from Kittitas County for closer viewpoints. Viewpoint 5 (see Figures 5a and 5b in Appendix B) is located at the intersection of Wiehl Road and a private drive and represents views that people driving by the area on a public road, or people driving to nearby residences, would have looking toward the project. Viewpoint 6 (see Figures 6a and 6b of Appendix B) is from a residence approximately 800 feet southeast of the nearest project panels. Viewpoint 7 (see Figures 7a and 7b in Appendix B) is from a nearby residence that is also located approximately 800 feet away from the closest project panels. Viewpoint 10 (see Figures 10a and 10b in Appendix B) is from the location where Loping Lane crosses the existing Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) transmission line. This view is seen by people accessing private properties and residences via Loping Lane.

Viewpoints 8 and 9 were selected to illustrate views toward the project from two nearby public roads that are located in valleys below the project area. Viewpoint 8 (see Figure 8 in Appendix B) is located on Highway 970 approximately 0.5 mile south of the highways crossing of the Teanaway River. As seen in Figure 8, the sides of the upland area upon which the project would be built can be clearly seen, but the top cannot be. Viewpoint 9 is taken from Teanaway Road where the BPA transmission line crosses the road (see Figure 9 of Appendix B). Although project components would not be seen in this area, the location of this viewpoint is useful for depicting the BPA transmission line corridor in an area where it is very visible and viewing the north slope of the upland area on which the project would be constructed.

As the conceptual depictions of the project from Viewpoints 5, 6, 7, and 10 illustrate, close-up views of the proposed facility would be largely screened by topography and vegetation. The removal of trees on the horizon would be noticed from Viewpoint 5, but project

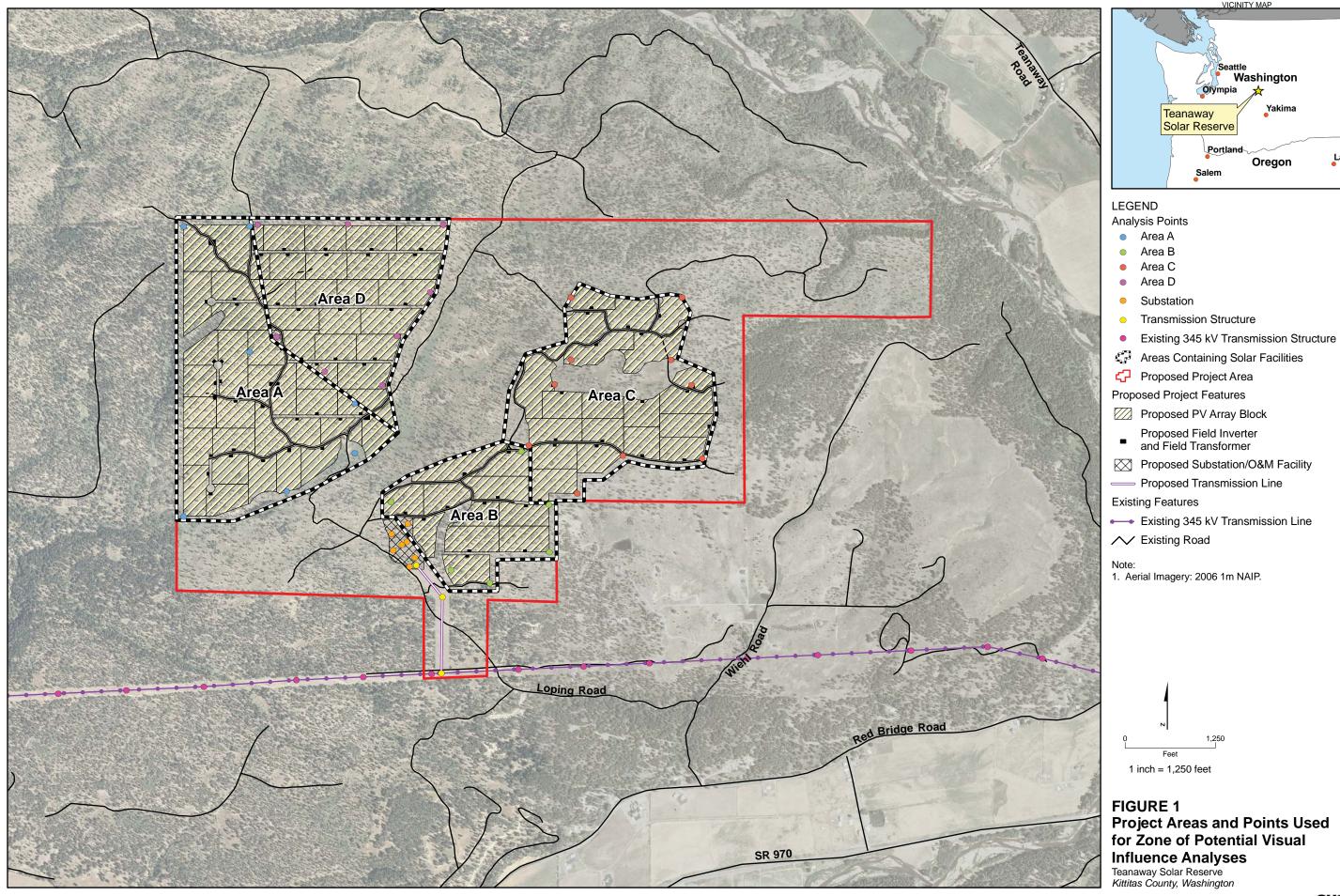
equipment would not be. The removal of trees would not greatly diminish the visual quality of the view from this location. The removal of trees will also be noticed from Viewpoint 6, and for several years after construction some panels will be seen. They would be located on a ridge and seen as a uniform horizontal shape that would differ from the irregular shape of the existing tree line. Trees planted near the perimeter of the facility, if desired, would help restore the irregular tree line and block views of parts of the panels within 3 to 10 years and would reduce the visibility of the project. The trees between Viewpoint 7 and the project would screen most views of the project from this location. The project would require the removal of some trees, which could be somewhat noticed between the trunks of closer trees that would remain. However, the removal of some trees would not greatly change the view from this location. Tree planted near the perimeter of the facility and/or on the property of the residence if desired, would screen the parts of it that might be seen from this location. People driving past Viewpoint 10 would see the project conductors (wires) connecting with the new structure that would be constructed as part of the project in the BPA right-of-way. Drivers might also notice where the 200-foot cleared right-of-way of the project would intersect at a right angle with the cleared 200-foot right-of-way of the BPA transmission line.

The visibility of the project transmission line would likely be similar to that of the adjacent BPA transmission line as indicated in Figures 8 and 9 of Appendix A. The project transmission line would connect with the existing BPA transmission line from the north and its cleared right-of-way would be visible from some areas depicted in Figure 9 of Appendix A. The one lattice structure (where it would tie into the BPA transmission line) and two pole structures would be potentially visible from essentially the same areas that the nearby BPA structures are. The transmission line would be visible from some areas near it, such as along the parts of the existing BPA transmission line right-of-way, as illustrated in Figure 10b of Appendix B. It would likely not be seen from most of the residences east of the project area (near Viewpoints 5, 6, and 7) due to topography and vegetation. The actual location of the transmission line will be likely be decided by the BPA, but the centerline and the 200-foot of cleared right-of-way will be at least 100 feet east of the nearest residence to the west of it and over 1,000 feet from the nearest residence to the east.

As indicated in Figures 10a and 10b of Appendix B, the substation would be less visible than the transmission line. The tallest structure (the 120-foot high "A-Frame") would potentially be seen from the residential area east of the project site. However, as with the project transmission line, topography and the presence of trees would likely screen most views of it from this area.

APPENDIX A Figures

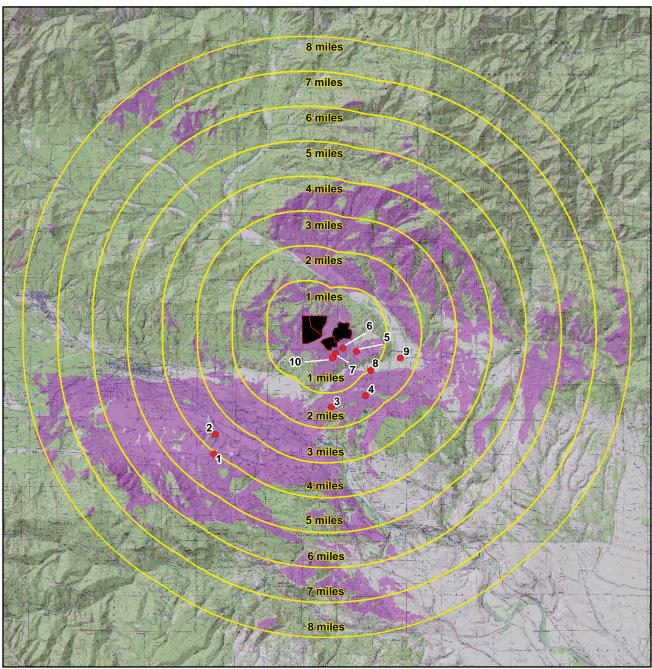
Appendix A Zone of Visual Influence Maps					
Zone of Visual Influence Figure Descriptions					
Figure Number	Title	Description/Notes			
1.	Project Areas and Points Used for Zone of Potential Influence Analysis Map	Depicts project layout and the four areas (A, B, D and D) that were used to assess potential visibility.			
2.	Zone of Potential Visual Influence – All Areas Map	Depicts areas within 8 miles from which the four areas (A to D) of the Project site that would contain would contain PV array blocks would potentially be visible.			
3.	Zone of Potential Visual Influence – Area A Map	Depicts areas within 8 miles from which the Area A of the Project site would potentially be visible.			
4.	Zone of Potential Visual Influence – Area B Map	Depicts areas within 8 miles from which the Area B of the Project site would potentially be visible.			
5.	Zone of Potential Visual Influence – Area C Map	Depicts areas within 8 miles from which the Area C of the Project site would potentially be visible.			
6.	Zone of Potential Visual Influence – Area D Map	Depicts areas within 8 miles from which the Area D of the Project site would potentially be visible.			
7.	Proposed PV Array Blocks and Zone of Potential Visual Influence in Vicinity of Project Site Map	This figure is a detailed (within 2-miles) image of the potential visibility for all four areas at the site that would contain PV array blocks.			
8.	Existing 500 kV Transmission Line Zone of Potential Visual Influence in Vicinity of Project Site Map	This figure depicts the potential visibility of existing towers in the BPA right-of-way south of the project site. It provides a "reality" check in that many areas that are "potentially visible" in terms of ZVI analyzes, are in reality, not visible due to vegetation, topography, etc. As people who are familiar with the project area are aware, the existing BPA transmission line structures are not as visible as depicted in this figure. It can be very reasonably assumed that many of the areas in all of these figures would not in reality be visible.			
9.	Proposed Transmission Line Zone of Potential Visual Influence in Vicinity of Project Site Map	This figure is a detailed (within 2-miles) image of the potential visibility of the three 150-foot high proposed transmission line structures.			
10.	Project Substation Zone of Potential Visual Influence in Vicinity of Project Site Map	This figure is a detailed (within 2-miles) image of the potential visibility of the proposed project substation.			



Spokane

La Grande

Idaho



Viewpoint

Areas Considered in Analysis

Areas Containing Solar Facilities

Distance from Project Site

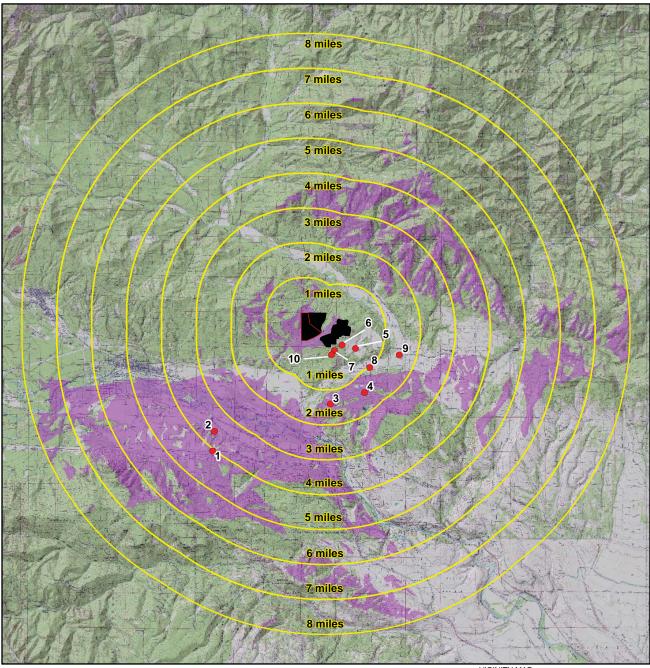
Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.





FIGURE 2 Zone of Potential Visual Influence-All Areas



Viewpoint

Area Considered in Analysis

Areas Containing Solar Facilities

Distance from Project Site

Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.

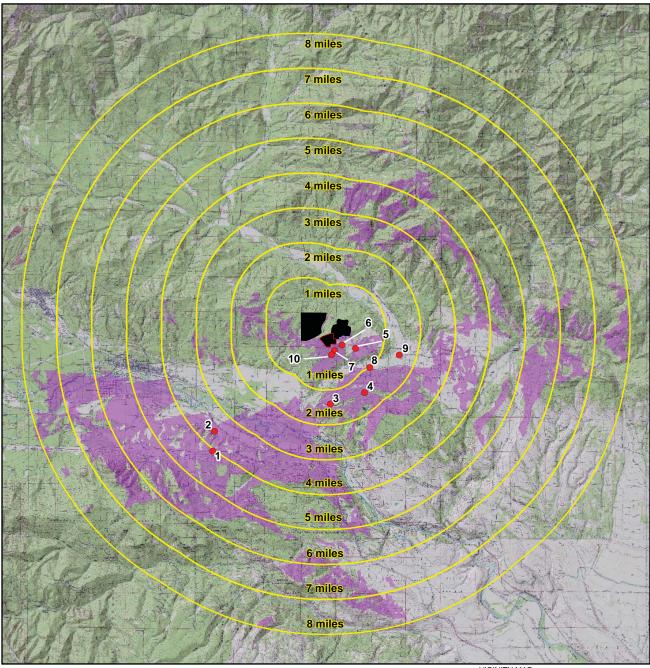




FIGURE 3 Zone of Potential Visual Influence-Area A

Teanaway Solar Reserve Kittitas County, Washington

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Viewpoint

Area Considered in Analysis

Areas Containing Solar Facilities

Distance from Project Site

Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

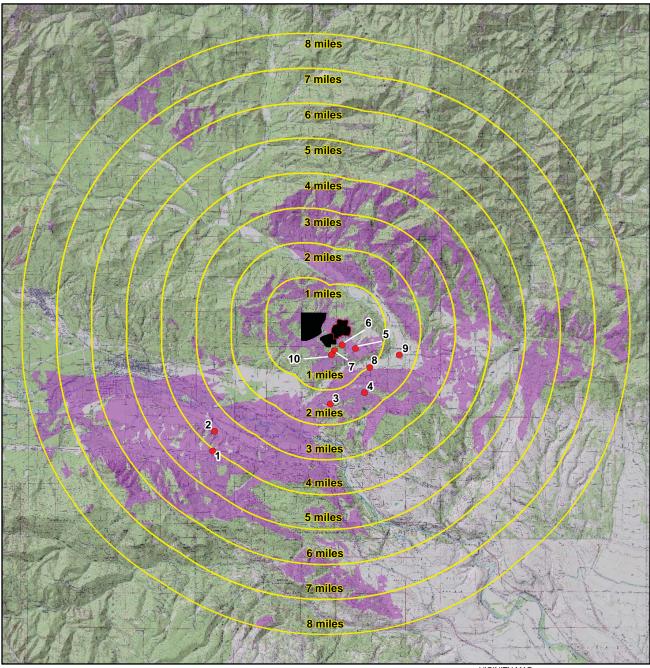
*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility.

The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.





FIGURE 4 **Zone of Potential Visual** Influence-Area B



Viewpoint

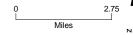
Area Considered in Analysis

Areas Containing Solar Facilities

Distance from Project Site

Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.



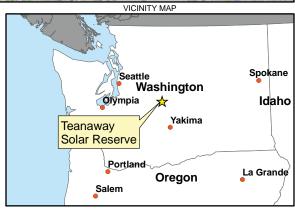
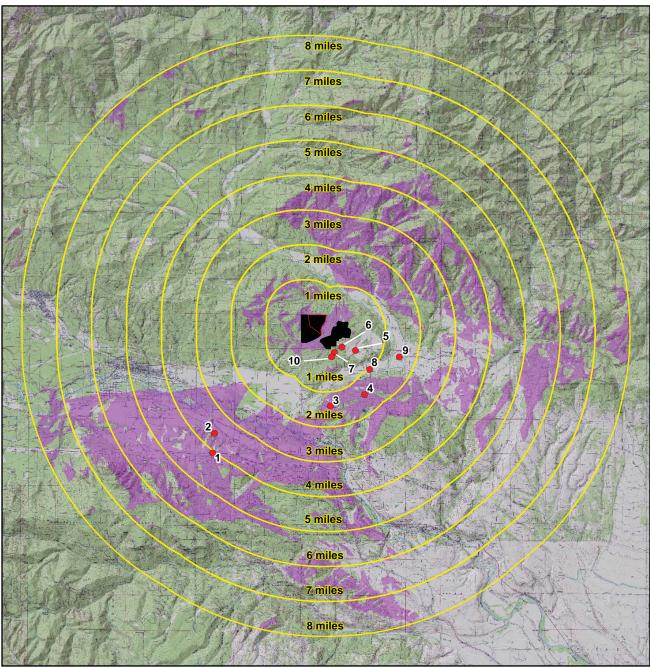


FIGURE 5 Zone of Potential Visual Influence-Area C



Viewpoint

Area Considered in Analysis

Areas Containing Solar Facilities

Distance from Project Site

Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.



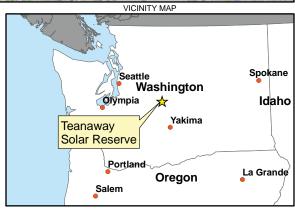
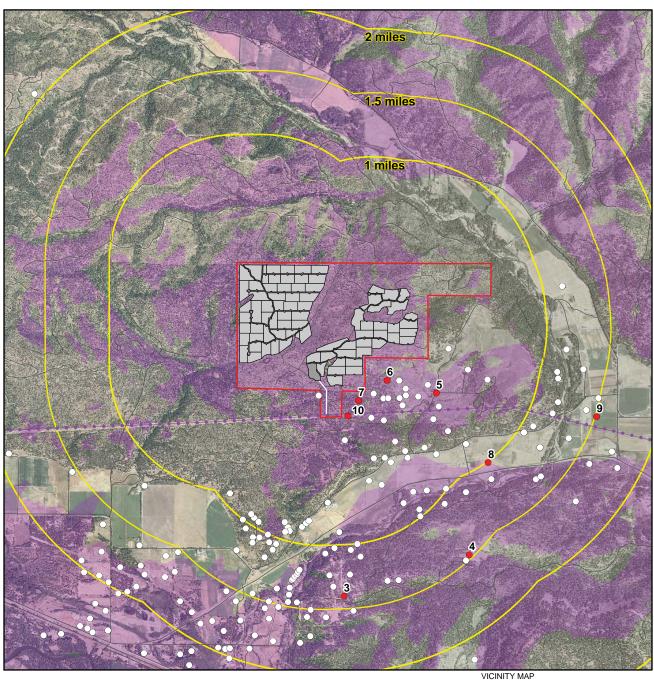
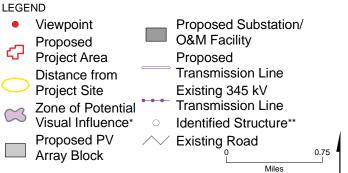


FIGURE 6 Zone of Potential Visual Influence-Area D





*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.

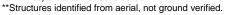
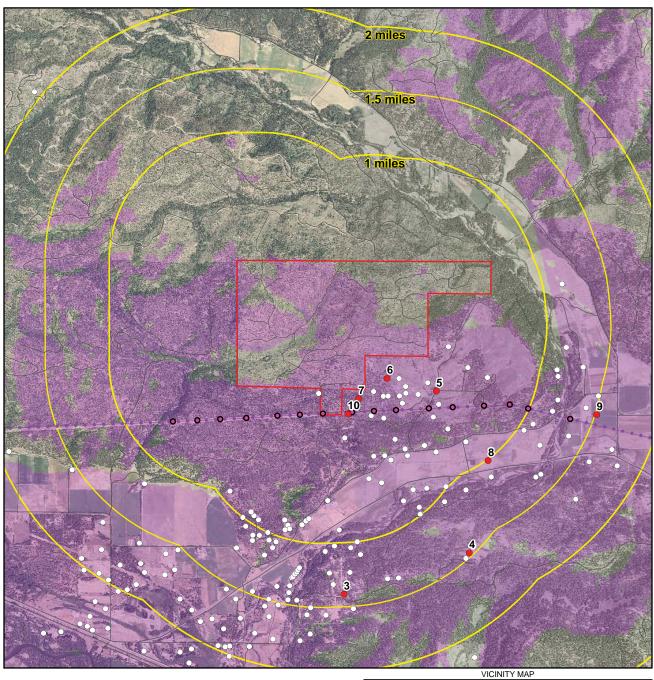




FIGURE 7
Proposed PV Array Blocks and
Zone of Potential Visual Influence
in Vicinity of Project Site



Proposed
Project Area
Distance from

Project Site

Zone of Potential Visual Influence*

Existing 345 kV
Transmission Line Structure
Existing 345 kV
Transmission Line
Identified Structure**

Existing Road



*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.

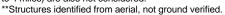
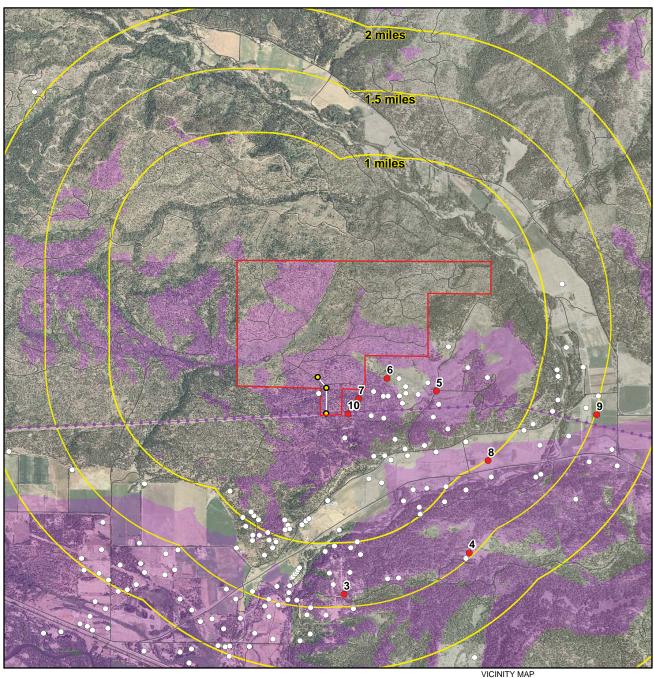




FIGURE 8
Existing 345 kV Transmission Line
Zone of Potential Visual Influence
in Vicinity of Project Site



Viewpoint

Proposed
Project Area
Distance from

Project Site

Zone of Potential

Visual Influence*

Proposed Transmission Structure 0 0.75

Miles
ence depicted in this figure

Identified Structure**

Proposed

Transmission Line

Existing 345 kV Transmission Line

Existing Road

*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.

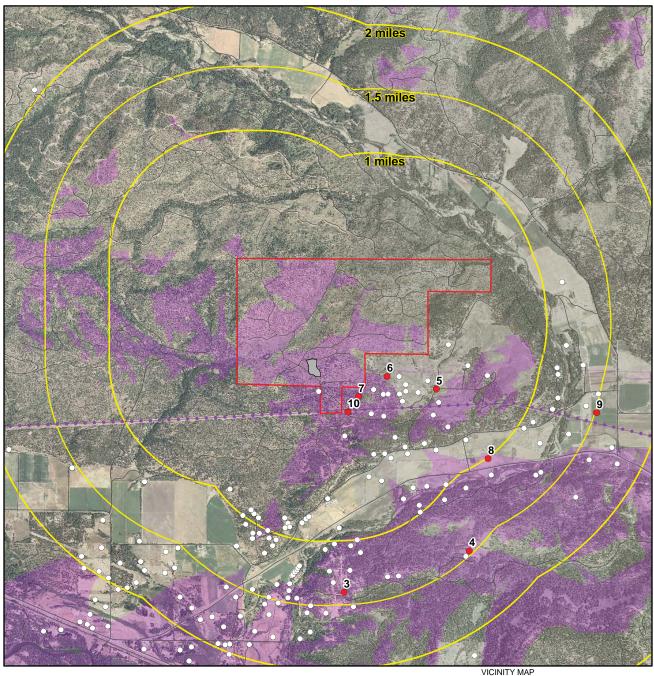
**Structures identified from aerial, not ground verified.



FIGURE 9
Proposed Transmission Line
Zone of Potential Visual Influence
in Vicinity of Project Site

Teanaway Solar Reserve Kittitas County, Washington

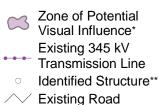
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ViewpointProposedProject Area

Distance from
Project Site

Proposed Substation/ O&M Facility





*Please note that the zone of potential visual influence depicted in this figure in very conservative in that it "overstates" the project's potential visibility. The Geographic Information System (GIS) model used to develop the figure does not take into account objects such as trees, buildings, and small topographic features that may block or screen views of the project. Factors that influence visibility such as haze, lighting conditions, weather, and viewing distance (the project would likely be difficult to see from beyond approximately 3.5 to 4 miles) are also not considered.

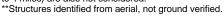




FIGURE 10 Project Substation Zone of Potential Visual Influence in Vicinity of Project Site

APPENDIX B Photos and Simulations

Appendix B Existing Condition Photographs and Visual Simulations						
Figure Number	Title	Description/Notes				
1a and b.	Viewpoint 1: Watson Cutoff Road (upper)	Viewpoint 1 is located along side Watson Cutoff Road just below the intersection with Upper Peoh Point Road. It is approximately 4 miles southwest of the closest edge of the study area. Figure 1a depicts the existing view and Figure 1b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project.				
2a and b	Viewpoint 2: Watson Cutoff Road (lower)	Viewpoint 2 is located on Watson Cutoff Road at a lower elevation than Location 3 and is approximately 0.2 miles from I-90. It is approximately 3.5 miles southwest of the closest edge of the study area. Figure 2a depicts the existing view and Figure 2b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project.				
3a and b	Viewpoint 3: Residences ¼ mile west of Lambert Road	Viewpoint 3 is located on residential property on the eastern slope of Lookout Mountain approximately 1.5 miles east of the study area. The location of the viewpoint is in a field above the residence. Figure 3a depicts the existing view and Figure 3b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project.				
4a and b	Viewpoint 4: Ridgewater Drive	Viewpoint 4 is situated on Ridgewater Drive on the eastern slope of Lookout Mountain approximately 1.5 miles east of the study area. The location one of the few public areas on the east slope of Lookout Mountain from which the study area can be viewed. Figure 4a depicts the existing view and Figure 4b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project.				
5a and b	Viewpoint 5: Residential Area Near Wiehl Road	Viewpoint 5 is taken from the intersection of Wiehl Road and a private drive looking towards the study area which is approximately 3,100 feet to the northwest. Figure 5a depicts the existing view and Figure 5b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project (note the removal of trees along the ridgeline).				
6a and b	Viewpoint 6: Residence	Viewpoint 6 is taken from a residence approximately 800 feet east and southeast of the nearest PV array block. Figure 6a depicts the existing view and Figure 6b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project (note the removal of trees along the ridgeline and visible panels. Planting new trees in cooperation with the resident will screen views of the array block within 5 to 10 years.				
7a and b	Viewpoint 7: Residence	Viewpoint 7 is taken from a residence approximately 800 feet south of the nearest PV array block. Figure 17a depicts the existing view which is largely composed of nearby coniferous trees and Figure 16b is a conceptual illustration of the proposed project (note some trees in the background would be removed).				
8	Viewpoint 8: SR 970	Existing condition photograph from SR 970 looking north to northwest at the southern edge of the "plateau" the project would be built on.				
9.	Viewpoint 9: Teanaway Road	Existing condition photograph of BPA transmission line right-of-way from Teanaway Road in the Teanaway River valley.				
10a and b	Viewpoint 10: Loping Road where it crosses over BPA transmission line corridor	Existing condition photograph and simulation of the proposed transmission line tying into the existing BPA 500 kV transmission line from the intersection of its right-of-way and Loping Road (which is used to access several homes southeast of the project site).				



Figure 1a: Existing view of Viewpoint 1, Watson Cutoff Road (Upper)



Figure 1b: Conceptual illustration of Viewpoint 1, Watson Cutoff Road (Upper)



Figure 2a: Existing view of Viewpoint 2, Watson Cutoff Road (Lower)



Figure 2b: Conceptual illustration of Viewpoint 2, Watson Cutoff Road (Lower)

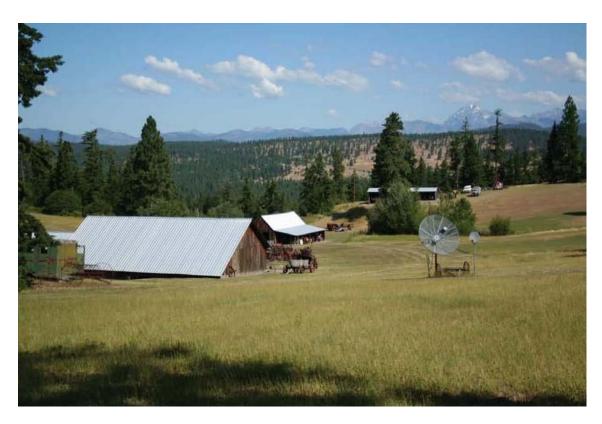


Figure 3a: Existing view of residences ¼ mile west of Lambert Road



Figure 3b: Conceptual illustration of residences ¼ mile west of Lambert Road



Figure 4a: Existing view of Viewpoint 4, Ridgewater Drive



Figure 4b: Conceptual illustration of Viewpoint 4, Ridgewater Drive



Figure 5a: Existing view of Viewpoint 5, residential area near Wiehl Road



Figure 5b: Conceptual illustration of Viewpoint 5, residential area near Wiehl Road



Figure 6a: Existing view from Viewpoint 6, a residence approximately 800 feet east and southeast of the nearest PV array block



Figure 6a: Conceptual illustration from Viewpoint 6, a residence approximately 800 feet east and southeast of the nearest PV array block



Figure 7a: Existing view from Viewpoint 7, a residence approximately 800 feet south of the nearest PV array block



Figure 7b: Conceptual illustration from Viewpoint 7, a residence approximately 800 feet south of the nearest PV array block (note some trees in the background would be removed)



Figure 8: Existing condition photograph from SR 970 looking north to northwest at the southern edge of the "plateau" the project would be built on



Figure 9: Existing condition photograph of BPA transmission line right-of-way from Teanaway Road in the Teanaway River valley.



Figure 10a: Existing view from Viewpoint 10 at Loping Lane where it crosses over BPA transmission line corridor.



Figure 10b: Conceptual illustration from Viewpoint 10, where the proposed transmission line would tie into the existing BPA 345 kV transmission line from the intersection of its right-of-way and Loping Lane.