

RCW 43.21C.535 Clean energy projects—Nonproject environmental impact statements. (1) The department of ecology shall prepare nonproject environmental impact statements, pursuant to RCW 43.21C.030, that assess and disclose the probable significant adverse environmental impacts, and that identify related mitigation measures, for each of the following categories of clean energy projects, and colocated battery energy storage projects that may be included in such projects:

(a) Green electrolytic or renewable hydrogen projects;

(b) Utility-scale solar energy projects, which will consider the findings of the Washington State University least-conflict solar siting process; and

(c) Onshore utility-scale wind energy projects.

(2) The scope of a nonproject environmental review shall be limited to the probable, significant adverse environmental impacts in geographic areas that are suitable for the applicable clean energy type. The department of ecology may consider standard attributes for likely development, proximity to existing transmission or complementary facilities, and planned corridors for transmission capacity construction, reconstruction, or enlargement. The nonproject review is not required to evaluate geographic areas that lack the characteristics necessary for the applicable clean energy project type.

(3) (a) The scope of nonproject environmental impact statements must consider, as appropriate, analysis of the following probable significant adverse environmental impacts, including direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts to:

(i) Historic and cultural resources;

(ii) Species designated for protection under RCW 77.12.020 or the federal endangered species act;

(iii) Landscape scale habitat connectivity and wildlife migration corridors;

(iv) Environmental justice and overburdened communities as defined in RCW 70A.02.010;

(v) Cultural resources and elements of the environment relevant to tribal rights, interests, and resources including tribal cultural resources, and fish, wildlife, and their habitat;

(vi) Land uses, including agricultural and ranching uses; and

(vii) Military installations and operations.

(b) The nonproject environmental impact statements must identify measures to avoid, minimize, and mitigate probable significant adverse environmental impacts identified during the review. These include measures to mitigate probable significant adverse environmental impacts to elements of the environment as defined in WAC 197-11-444 as it existed as of January 1, 2023, tribal rights, interests, and resources, including tribal cultural resources, as identified in RCW 70A.65.305, and overburdened communities as defined in RCW 70A.02.010. The department of ecology shall consult with federally recognized Indian tribes and other agencies with expertise in identification and mitigation of probable, significant adverse environmental impacts including, but not limited to, the department of fish and wildlife. The department of ecology shall further specify when probable, significant adverse environmental impacts cannot be mitigated.

(4) In defining the scope of nonproject review of clean energy projects, the department of ecology shall request input from agencies, federally recognized Indian tribes, industry, stakeholders, local

governments, and the public to identify the geographic areas suitable for the applicable clean energy project type, based on the climatic and geophysical attributes conducive to or required for project development. The department of ecology will provide opportunities for the engagement of tribes, overburdened communities, and stakeholders that self-identify an interest in participating in the processes.

(5) The department of ecology will offer early and meaningful consultation with any affected federally recognized Indian tribe on the nonproject review under this section for the purpose of understanding potential impacts to tribal rights and resources, including tribal cultural resources, archaeological sites, sacred sites, fisheries, or other rights and interests in tribal lands and lands within which an Indian tribe or tribes possess rights reserved or protected by federal treaty, statute, or executive order. Certain information obtained by the department of ecology under this section is exempt from disclosure consistent with RCW 42.56.300.

(6) Final nonproject environmental review documents for the clean energy projects identified in subsection (1) of this section, where applicable, shall include maps identifying probable, significant adverse environmental impacts for the resources evaluated. Maps must be prepared with the intention to illustrate probable, significant impacts, creating a tool that may be used by project proponents, tribes, and government to inform decision making. The maps may not be used in the place of surveys on specific parcels of land or input of a potentially affected federally recognized Indian tribe regarding specific parcels.

(7) Following the completion of a nonproject review subject to this section, the interagency clean energy siting coordinating council created in RCW 43.394.010 must consider the findings and make recommendations to the legislature and governor on potential areas to designate as clean energy preferred zones for the clean energy project technology analyzed, and any taxation, regulatory, environmental review, or other benefits that should accrue to projects in such designated preferred zones.

(8) Nothing in this section prohibits or precludes projects from being located outside areas designated as clean energy preferred zones. [2023 c 230 § 302.]

Findings—Intent—2023 c 230: See note following RCW 43.394.010.