



Aura Power Renewables Ltd.

Provost Solar Project

June 14, 2023



Alberta Utilities Commission

Decision 27918-D01-2023

Aura Power Renewables Ltd.

Provost Solar Project

Proceeding 27918

Applications 27918-A001 and 27918-A002

June 14, 2023

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1 Decision summary

1. In this decision, the Alberta Utilities Commission approves applications from Aura Power Renewables Ltd. to construct and operate a power plant, designated as the Provost Solar Project and connect the power plant to the FortisAlberta Inc. distribution system.

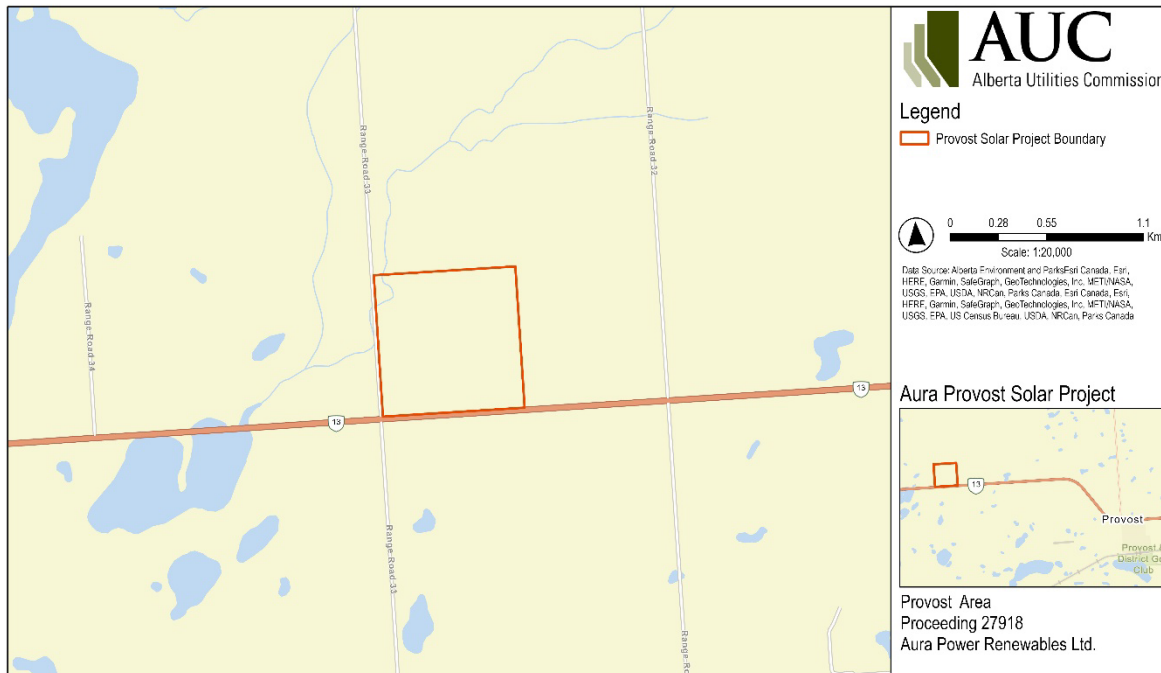
2 Applications

2. Aura filed applications with the Commission under sections 11 and 18 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act* for approval to construct and operate the 22.5-megawatt (MW) Provost Solar Project and to connect the power plant to the FortisAlberta Inc. electric distribution system (together, the Provost Solar Project or project). The applications were registered on December 23, 2022, as applications 27918-A001 and 27918-A002.

3. The project would be located on approximately 130 acres of private, cultivated land approximately 5.5 kilometres northwest of the town of Provost within the southwest quarter of Section 27, Township 39, Range 3, west of the Fourth Meridian, as shown in Figure 1.

4. The power plant would consist of approximately 54,483 solar modules, mounted on a single-axis tracking system. Aura stated that the photovoltaic solar modules have not been finalized. The power plant would also include seven Sunny Central SMA SC 4600 UP inverters.

Figure 1. Provost Solar Project location



5. Aura's applications included:

- A description of its participant involvement program, which detailed personal consultation with stakeholders within 400 metres of the project and notification to stakeholders within 800 metres of the project.¹
- An environmental evaluation, which detailed baseline conditions of the project area and identified potential environmental effects of the construction and operation of the project.²
- A letter of non-objection from FortisAlberta Inc. indicating that it is prepared to allow the interconnection of the power plant to its 25-kilovolt distribution system, pending final execution of an interconnection agreement.³
- A site-specific emergency response plan for the construction and operation of the project that was provided to local emergency services.⁴
- A solar glare assessment completed by Green Cat Renewables Canada (GCR), which concluded the project is not likely to have the potential to create hazardous glare conditions for the assessed receptors.⁵

¹ Exhibit 27918-X0005, Appendix D - 2022-12-22 PIP Report - Provost_FINAL.

² Exhibit 27918-X0007, Appendix F - 7654002-000000-4E-ERA-0001-R00_EA.

³ Exhibit 27918-X0020, AUC Letter of Non-Objection - Aura Renewables - Provost 1 Solar.

⁴ Exhibit 27918-X0009, Appendix H - 2022-11-22 Provost Solar - ERP.

⁵ Exhibit 27918-X0010, Appendix I - Provost Solar Glare Assessment.

- An environmental protection plan, which outlined mitigation measures to limit potential adverse effects to the environment during the pre-construction, construction and operation phases of the project.⁶
- An initial conservation and reclamation plan developed with the objective to return the project land to an equivalent land capability once the project is decommissioned in accordance with the *Conservation and Reclamation Directive for Renewable Energy Operations*.⁷
- A noise impact assessment (NIA) summary form completed by GCR, which concluded the project would comply with the Commission’s Rule 012: *Noise Control*.⁸
- A renewable energy referral report from the Alberta Environment and Parks – Fish and Wildlife Stewardship (AEP-FWS),⁹ dated January 15, 2020, which ranked the project an overall low to moderate risk to wildlife and wildlife habitat.¹⁰
- A *Historical Resources Act* approval dated December 18, 2017.¹¹

6. Aura’s preliminary project schedule indicated that construction of the project is set to start in April 2024, with a commercial operation date in January 2025.

7. The Commission issued a notice of applications in accordance with Section 7 of Rule 001: *Rules of Practice*. No submissions were received in response to the notice.

3 Findings

8. For the reasons outlined below, the Commission finds that approval of the project is in the public interest having regard to the social, economic, and other effects of the project, including its effect on the environment.

9. The Commission has reviewed the applications and has determined that the information requirements specified in Rule 007: *Applications for Power Plants, Substations, Transmission Lines, Industrial System Designations, Hydro Developments and Gas Utility Pipelines* have been met.

10. Regarding Aura’s participant involvement program, Aura’s application indicates that it consulted residents, landowners, and occupants within 400 metres of the project and notified residents, landowners, and occupants within 800 metres of the project. There were no submissions received in response to the Commission’s notice of applications. The Commission finds that Aura’s participant involvement program satisfied the requirements of Rule 007.

11. The Commission has reviewed the NIA for the project, finds that it meets the requirements of Rule 012 and accepts the conclusion of the NIA that noise from the project will

⁶ Exhibit 27918-X0011, Appendix J - 7654001-000000-4E-ERA-0002-R00_EPP.

⁷ Exhibit 27918-X0012, Appendix K - 7654002-000000-4E-EIN-0001-R00_CR.

⁸ Exhibit 27918-X0013, Appendix L - Provost - Noise Impact Assessment.

⁹ On October 24, 2022, Alberta Environment and Parks (AEP) was renamed the Ministry of Environment and Protected Areas (AEPA). Any references to AEP in Rule 033: *Post-approval monitoring requirements for wind and solar power plants* and elsewhere that relate to AEP will be referenced in this document as AEPA.

¹⁰ Exhibit 27918-X0014, Appendix M - 20200115_AEP-WM Referral Report_Provost Solar Project_signed.

¹¹ Exhibit 27918-X0015, Appendix N - Signed_HRA_Response.

be compliant with permissible sound levels set out in Rule 012 for daytime and nighttime periods.

12. The Commission accepts the conclusion in the solar glare assessment that the project is unlikely to have the potential to create hazardous glare conditions. The glare assessment predicted that the two dwellings within 800 metres of the project would not receive any glare from the project. The Commission notes that the predicted yellow-grade glare for Highway 13 is expected for up to 566 minutes per year. GCR explained that the duration of glare that a driver will experience would be less than the predicted levels, because the driver is typically travelling through the area instead of being still on the road. The Commission requires that any glare issues associated with the project that may arise be addressed by Aura in a timely manner. Therefore, the Commission imposes the following condition of approval:

- a. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall file a report with the Commission detailing any complaints or concerns it receives or is made aware of regarding solar glare from the project during the first year of operation, as well as Aura's response to the complaints or concerns. Aura shall file the report no later than 13 months after the project becomes operational.

13. The Commission notes that the predictions and associated conclusion in the solar glare assessment report were premised upon the use of an anti-reflective coating on the project solar panels. Therefore, the Commission imposes the following condition of approval:

- b. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall use an anti-reflective coating on the solar panels used for the project.

14. Aura did not specify the finalized equipment selection for the project. Accordingly, the Commission imposes the following condition of approval:

- c. Once Aura Power Renewables Ltd. has finalized its equipment selection for the photovoltaic power plant it must file a final project update to the Commission to confirm that the project has stayed within the final project update specified allowances for solar power plants. The final project update must be filed at least 90 days prior to the start of construction.

3.1 Environment

15. Aura retained BBA Engineering Ltd. to produce an environmental evaluation, an environmental protection plan and a preliminary conservation and reclamation plan. The environmental evaluation described the baseline environmental conditions, identified potential effects and developed mitigation for environmental sensitivities prior to construction and operation. The environmental protection plan described Aura's plans to mitigate any adverse effects during construction and operation of the power plant. The initial conservation and reclamation plan described the planning requirements to help ensure successful reclamation at the end of the project's life.

16. An AEPA referral report was received on January 15, 2020, with an overall "low to moderate" risk to wildlife and wildlife habitat. A low risk ranking was determined for all wildlife factors considered with the exception of wildlife mortality, which received a moderate risk ranking because of high avian use in wetlands adjacent to the project area.

17. The initial project layout filed with the Commission showed that the project would be sited 920 metres from the Hansman Lake Important Bird Area (IBA). This did not align with Best Management Practice 200.1.1 of the *Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects* (the Directive), which states “[t]he solar energy project should not occur within 1000m of a wetland based Important Bird Area (IBA).”¹² Additionally, the proximity of the project to the IBA was not disclosed to AEPA as part of the renewable energy project submission report.

18. In response to Commission information requests, Aura reconfigured the proposed project layout such that all project infrastructure is greater than 1,000 metres away from the Hansman Lake IBA, while remaining inside of the original project boundary. The Commission is satisfied with this approach.

19. The Commission notes that some wildlife surveys appear to have expired, which does not comply with the Directive. In response to an information request, Aura stated that it will update all expired wildlife surveys, including migration surveys, lek surveys, raptor nest surveys and breeding bird surveys. Accordingly, the Commission imposes the following condition of approval:

- d. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. must update migration surveys, lek surveys, raptor nest surveys and breeding bird surveys in accordance with the *Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects*. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. must update Alberta Environment and Protected Areas if any significant changes or new wildlife features are discovered (e.g., sharp-tailed grouse leks, raptor nests, etc.). Any significant changes or newly discovered features as well as any correspondence with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas about these changes and features must be filed with the Commission at least 90 days prior to the start of construction.

20. Rule 033: *Post-approval Monitoring Requirements for Wind and Solar Power Plants* requires approval holders to submit annual post-construction monitoring survey reports to AEPA and the Commission. Therefore, the Commission imposes the following condition of approval:

- e. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall submit an annual post-construction monitoring report to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas - Fish and Wildlife Stewardship and the Commission no later than January 31 of the year following the mortality monitoring period, and on or before the same date every subsequent year for which Alberta Environment and Protected Areas requires surveys pursuant to subsection 3(3) of Rule 033: *Post-approval Monitoring Requirements for Wind and Solar Power Plants*.

21. The Commission understands that post-construction monitoring will inform any adaptive management requirements in consultation with AEPA, including additional measures to mitigate risk to birds, if required.

22. The Commission finds that Aura’s environmental assessments and proposed mitigations are suitable, and, in light of the reconfigured project layout, that the environmental risk of the project is acceptable.

¹² *Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects*, Alberta Environmental and Parks, effective October 4, 2017.

23. In addition, Aura has adequately considered the decommissioning and reclamation activities that will be required at the end of the project's life, including its obligations under the *Conservation and Reclamation Regulation*.

24. Aura provided a letter from FortisAlberta indicating that it is prepared to allow the interconnection of the project to its distribution system. As Aura has met the information requirements for a connection order, the Commission approves the interconnection.

25. In light of the foregoing, and subject to the conditions set out in this decision and the commitments made by Aura, the Commission considers the applications to be in the public interest in accordance with Section 17 of the *Alberta Utilities Commission Act*.

4 Decision

26. Pursuant to Section 11 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, the Commission approves Application 27918-A001 and grants Aura Power Renewables Ltd. the approval set out in Appendix 1 – Power Plant Approval 27918-D02-2023 to construct and operate the Provost Solar Project (Appendix 1 will be distributed separately).

27. Pursuant to Section 18 of the *Hydro and Electric Energy Act*, the Commission approves Application 27918-A002 and grants Aura Power Renewables Ltd. the approval set out in Appendix 2 – Connection Order 27918-D03-2023 to connect the Provost Solar Project to the FortisAlberta Inc. distribution system (Appendix 2 will be distributed separately).

Dated on June 14, 2023.

Alberta Utilities Commission

(original signed by)

Kristi Sebalj
Vice-Chair

(original signed by)

Merete Heggelund
Acting Commission Member

Appendix A – Summary of Commission conditions of approval in the decision

This section is intended to provide a summary of all conditions of approval specified in the decision for the convenience of readers. Conditions that require subsequent filings with the Commission will be tracked as directions in the AUC's eFiling System. In the event of any difference between the conditions in this section and those in the main body of the decision, the wording in the main body of the decision shall prevail.

The following are conditions of Decision 27918-D01-2023 that require subsequent filings with the Commission and will be included as conditions of Power Plant Approval 27918-D02-2023:

- Once Aura Power Renewables Ltd. has finalized its equipment selection for the photovoltaic power plant it must file a final project update to the Commission to confirm that the project has stayed within the final project update specified allowances for solar power plants. The final project update must be filed at least 90 days prior to the start of construction.
- Aura Power Renewables Ltd. must update migration surveys, lek surveys, raptor nest surveys and breeding bird surveys in accordance with the *Wildlife Directive for Alberta Solar Energy Projects*. Aura Power Renewables Ltd. must update Alberta Environment and Protected Areas if any significant changes or new wildlife features are discovered (e.g., sharp-tailed grouse leks, raptor nests, etc.). Any significant changes or newly discovered features as well as any correspondence with Alberta Environment and Protected Areas about these changes and features must be filed with the Commission at least 90 days prior to the start of construction.
- Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall submit an annual post-construction monitoring report to Alberta Environment and Protected Areas – Fish and Wildlife Stewardship and the Commission no later than January 31 of the year following the mortality monitoring period, and on or before the same date every subsequent year for which Alberta Environment and Protected Areas requires surveys pursuant to subsection 3(3) of Rule 033: *Post-approval Monitoring Requirements for Wind and Solar Power Plants*.

The following is a condition of Decision 27918-D01-2023 that does not require a subsequent filing with the Commission:

- Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall file a report with the Commission detailing any complaints or concerns it receives or is made aware of regarding solar glare from the project during the first year of operation, as well as Aura's response to the complaints or concerns. Aura shall file the report no later than 13 months after the project becomes operational
- Aura Power Renewables Ltd. shall use an anti-reflective coating on the project solar panels.