Joshua Rubenstein

October 1st, 2026

To: Diane Butorac, Senior Environmental Planner

From: The Nature Conservancy in Washington

Re: The Nature Conservancy's Comments on Scoping Document for Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement on Battery Energy Storage System Facilities in Washington State

Dear Diane Butorac,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a non-profit conservation organization working nationally and internationally to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. On behalf of our Washington members, we thank the Department of Ecology (Ecology) for the opportunity to provide scoping comments for the battery energy storage system (BESS) Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS).

BESS are critical for the state to comply with the Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) and Climate Commitment Act (CCA). In addition, TNC's 2023 Power of Place West study (https://www.nature.org/ powerofplace) shows that western states can affordably and reliably meet future energy needs and achieve economy-wide net-zero greenhouse gas emissions under ambitious electrification scenarios by 2050 while conserving sensitive natural areas and working lands. BESS systems are a key component of reducing the land-use impacts of the clean energy transition by reducing the need for transmission and utility scale wind and solar while increasing energy resilience, reliability, and affordability.

Types of Facilities: TNC recommends expanding the scope of the technology analyzed in the PEIS to all energy storage with similar potential impacts. The Scoping Document states that the PEIS will focus on lithium-ion BESS facilities and lists specific project dimensions. However, battery technology is changing rapidly and many battery technologies will have similar footprints and environmental impacts to lithium ion. Expanding the scope to include other battery and long duration energy storage technologies such as iron-air batteries, heat batteries, sodium batteries, and more will future-proof the PEIS to ensure the document stays relevant in a fast-evolving industry.

Geographic Scope: To maximize the climate and grid benefits of batteries they need to be sited near electrical load and electrical infrastructure. Therefore Ecology can ensure the

applicability of this PEIS by including urban growth areas in all parts of the state as in-scope. Ecology should prioritize areas near existing or planned and substations.

Alternatives: Given the proliferation of BESS moratoria and the challenge that poses to building BESS in Washington this PEIS should not assume that BESS will be permitted under existing laws. Therefore, in order to do a cumulative impacts assessment this PEIS should explore at least the following three alternatives. 1) Meet CETA targets with low BESS deployment. 2) Meet firm energy needs with gas and fail to meet CETA targets. 3) Meet CETA targets with high BESS deployment using the PEIS. The first two are no-action alternatives. Utility scale energy infrastructure requires tradeoffs, and BESS is no exception. It is critical to evaluate the impacts of the additional no-action alternatives to truly understand the cumulative adverse environmental impacts of not building BESS and how they compare to the environmental benefits and potential adverse impacts of BESS.

Direct Impacts: This PEIS should evaluate BESS built to industry standards such as the most current NFPA 855 and UL 9540 and 9540A. Given the quickly improving safety of BESS technology the potential adverse environmental impacts under standard operating conditions and system failure conditions should be evaluated separately. Impacts from normal operating conditions are important to assess and mitigate in the PEIS and will likely stem from siting decisions. Separately evaluating the impacts from potential BESS failures and their likelihood are important to accurately determine the probability of significant adverse environmental impacts and required mitigation.

Indirect Impacts: Under the no-action alternatives Ecology should evaluate the potential significant adverse environmental impacts of not building BESS, knowing that the energy that BESS would provide will have to come from another firm resource, likely gas. Gas plants have significant adverse environmental impacts across many of the resources the PEIS will evaluate, impacts that can be avoided through BESS. Meeting CETA targets without BESS will require significantly more environmental impacts from larger solar, wind, and transmission buildouts. Impacts assessment should include an assessment of benefits as well as tradeoffs. In the example of the collocated BESS from the wind and solar PEISs, public services and utilities are listed as a potential significant impact under environmental justice. BESS will likely have positive impacts on electrical utility reliability and resilience, especially when appropriately sited near overburdened communities that often suffer from more frequent and longer blackouts, so those benefits should be evaluated. Minimizing adverse impacts of the energy system is one of the biggest impacts of building BESS.

Cumulative Effects: Using the no-action alternatives described in this letter, Ecology can more wholistically compare the cumulative effects of BESS projects across the three

alternatives. That way, rather than assuming that by clearing land BESS automatically has an adverse environmental impact, Ecology can account for the land-saving nature of BESS in its analysis and treat BESS as a mitigation measure in and of itself. By displacing gas BESS also promotes environmental health and safety. Without considering the energy-system impacts of BESS it will be impossible for Ecology to identify the tradeoffs inherent in building utility scale infrastructure and the ways that examining the adverse impacts on a single project site can mischaracterize the significance of environmental impacts.

Mitigation Measures: TNC encourages Ecology to ensure that building to current industry best practices and standards are included in the mitigation measures, as is industry best practice fire response. Ensuring these best practices are followed is key to mitigating the risk of adverse environmental impacts from BESS failures. TNC urges Ecology to include site design considerations in mitigation measures for standard operations. Given the current push to ban or install restrictively large buffers around BESS projects in many jurisdictions, identifying alternative mitigation strategies such as sound barriers to reduce noise buffers will help jurisdictions appropriately site BESS while maximizing the state's ability to meet climate and energy goals.

This PEIS is an important opportunity to ensure that Washington can build the BESS we need to meet climate laws and improve energy resilience by adapting to more volatile and extreme weather while protecting the environment and public health.

We appreciate Ecology's consideration of these comments. Please feel free to contact me at joshua.rubenstein@tnc.org with any questions on our comments.

Sincerely,

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