

## DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

### Bonneville Power Administration

#### Decision to Interconnect with Sierra Pacific Power Company's Alturas Transmission Line Project

##### I. Background

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is a self-financed Federal power marketing agency with statutory responsibilities to supply electricity to utility, industrial, and other customers in the Pacific Northwest. BPA owns and operates 23,646 circuit kilometers (kM) (14,779 circuit mi) of transmission lines in the Pacific Northwest. BPA provides transmission wheeling services to others if its existing transmission facilities have surplus capacity. Transmission wheeling is also provided by Sierra Pacific Power Company (SPPCo). BPA has contracted with SPPCo for many years for delivery of BPA energy over their transmission lines to two BPA customers, Harney Electric Cooperative and Wells Rural Electric Cooperative, in Northern Nevada.

SPPCo consulted with BPA during the early stages of their planning for the Alturas Transmission Line Project. SPPCo requested an interconnection with BPA's 230-kilovolt (kV) Malin-Warner line in the vicinity of Alturas, California. SPPCo needs that would be achieved by the line are the following: increased import capacity (360 megawatt (mw) to 660 mw); improved reliability and security to SPPCo customers; and to provide additional access to the Pacific Northwest power market.

As a Federal agency, BPA is required to consider the environmental impacts of such a proposal prior to making a final decision, pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Bureau of Land Management in Susanville, California, had initiated scoping and had assumed the responsibility of lead federal agency for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) preparation. BPA participated as a cooperating agency in the EIS.

BPA adopted the Alturas Transmission Line Project Final EIS as a Department of Energy EIS (DOE/EIS-0256). The notice of availability for the Final EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on November 24, 1995. The notice of this adoption was sent to the project mailing list and was published in the *Federal Register* on February 2, 1996. The Bureau of Land Management executed a Record of Decision for their project on February 9, 1996.

##### II. Decisions

BPA has used the EIS to consider the environmental impacts that would result from SPPCo's proposed line as well as BPA's integrating line and substation facilities and has decided to grant SPPCo an interconnection with the BPA's transmission system. This interconnection will enable both BPA and SPPCo to deliver power back and forth

between the Pacific Northwest and Nevada in order to serve the needs of their customers. The Alturas Transmission Line Project will provide BPA an alternative wheeling path to sell and market power in Nevada and the Southwest.

To achieve the interconnection with the new line, BPA will tap the Malin-Warner 230-kV line near structure 61/3, and construct a 2.81-km (1.8-mi) loop line into the new Alturas Substation (Devils Garden site). Single-circuit wood pole transmission line structures will be used just outside of the Alturas Substation and at the intersection of the Malin-Warner line near structure 61/3. The design of structures for the remainder of the loop line is still presently uncertain. The Forest Service (the entire line is on Forest Service land) is concerned over the view of the loop line from Crowder Flat Road and recommended that structures not exceed 21.33 meters (m) (70 feet) in height. BPA's initial design for the line called for double-circuit structures that are 25.90-28.95 m (85-90 ft) in height. BPA will either select the double-circuit design, place the structures closer together (every 91.44 m (300 ft) versus 182.88 m (600 ft)), or move the centerline of the loop line about 60.96 m (200 ft) from Crowder Flat road to provide a buffer of trees between the road and the line. Placing added structures in the line will double the number of transmission structures. BPA will work with the Forest Service to define a transmission structural design that is mutually satisfactory and which minimizes visual impacts.

BPA has also decided to build the 230-kV terminal equipment in the Alturas Substation and to install a new narrow band, point-to-point, microwave radio repeater at the existing Happy Camp telecommunications site. The microwave radio will link the new Alturas Substation via Happy Camp to the BPA's existing communications system at Captain Jack Substation near Malin, Oregon. BPA will also retain and use the existing ultra high frequency radio links from Warner Substation via Happy Camp to Buck Butte. All of the equipment will be installed in existing buildings.

### III. Alternatives considered in the EIS

The EIS describes a variety of alternative routes for the Alturas Transmission Line Project. The scope of BPA's involvement, and the alternatives considered by BPA in reaching these decisions, is limited to alternative routes for the loop line and alternate locations for Alturas Substation. The Final EIS describes two alternate locations for the Alturas Substation. In addition to the Devils Garden site, the Mill site is located at the edge of the Town of Alturas and requires a loop line route that passes near a number of developed land uses.

The EIS also discussed the No Action Alternative (No Project Alternative in the EIS). Under the No Action Alternative, no adverse environmental impacts from the construction and operation of the proposed project would occur. The EIS describes the proposed Alturas Transmission Line Project as environmentally preferable to the No Action Alternative because SPPCo would need to add new transmission facilities and generation resources to compensate for existing system limitations and anticipated load growth.

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not sign an Interconnection Agreement with SPPCo. BPA's 230-kV loop line would not be built. The Hilltop Substation would not be constructed, and no additional microwave radio link would be installed. Without an interconnection to the BPA transmission grid, SPPCo's 345-kV transmission line would not be functional and thus would not be constructed.

#### IV. Decision Factors

BPA's decision to sign an Interconnection Agreement with SPPCo will enable expanded power sales and energy exchanges between the Pacific Northwest and Nevada. A second transmission path between the Pacific Northwest and Nevada will enable BPA to provide more reliable service to its customers in Northern Nevada. The interconnection will also enable BPA to market surplus energy resources in Nevada.

The Energy Act of 1992 (Energy Act) provides open access to surplus capacity on the transmission facilities of others. Granting an interconnection to SPPCo is consistent with the purposes of the Energy Act.

The environmental impacts of the Devils Garden site and associated loop line route are less significant than those of the Mill site. The Mill site and associated loop line would create significant non-mitigatable visual impacts, impact an area containing prehistoric hunting blinds, impact the Arrowhead Golf Course, and cause greater construction impacts to existing land uses. In addition, considerable public opposition to the Mill site was expressed at the EIS review meetings. The Devils Garden site would create greater impacts to vegetation and wildlife resources. To minimize impacts to deer, construction of the Devils Garden site and the loop line will be scheduled to avoid critical deer wintering periods. The Alturas Substation site (Devils Garden) was designed to avoid nearby cultural resources.

The No Action Alternative will not provide increased service reliability for BPA's Nevada customers, would not enable expanded power sales or exchanges between the Pacific Northwest and Nevada, and would not be consistent with the objectives of the Energy Act. BPA feels that the mitigation commitments defined in the EIS will reduce the environmental impact of the project to acceptable levels.

#### V. Mitigation and Monitoring Plan

The discussion of mitigation and monitoring measures can be found in the EIS Part C, Environmental Analysis; and Part F, Mitigation, Monitoring, Compliance, & Reporting. Part F lists all of the mitigation plans that have been developed for the project. BPA's Interconnection Agreement with SPPCo will be made contingent upon completion of the mitigation measures defined in the EIS. BPA will undertake those mitigation measures defined in the EIS which pertain to the 230-kV transmission loop line. Specifically, BPA will design the loop line to minimize visual impacts and prevent electrocution of birds, avoid construction during critical deer wintering periods, take actions to minimize

erosion during construction, reestablish plant communities damaged by construction, and site roads and transmission structures to avoid cultural resources.

BPA environmental staff will periodically monitor construction activities to assure that agreed upon mitigation measures are applied.

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Date

/s/ Randall W. Hardy  
Administrator and  
Chief Executive Officer