

Spar Canyon-Round Valley Service Road Project and Right-of-Way Amendment Finding of No Significant Impact

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Bonneville Power Administration
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SUMMARY

Bonneville Power Administration announces its environmental findings on the Spar Canyon-Round Valley Service Road Project and Right-of-Way Amendment. The project would involve road construction and improvement activities along an approximately 4.9-mile route between the transmission line structures of BPA's Spar Canyon-Round Valley No. 1 transmission line located on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land in Custer County, Idaho.

BPA and BLM prepared an environmental assessment evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action Alternative. The EA was released for public comment in July 2018; the two comments received were supportive of the proposal given the mitigation measures and best management practices that would be implemented. Based on the analysis in the EA and with consideration of public comments, BPA has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment under the National Environmental Policy Act (42 United States Code 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required, and BPA issues this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent. BLM plans to prepare their own findings or decision documents for the project.

In addition, BPA prepared a Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) that lists all the mitigation measures that BPA and its construction contractor will implement. That MAP is attached.

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY

BPA will mail this FONSI and attached MAP directly to individuals who previously requested a copy, and will also mail a notification of availability to other potentially affected parties. In addition, BPA will post the EA, FONSI, and MAP on the project website:

www.bpa.gov/goto/SparCanyon

PROPOSED ACTION

Under the Proposed Action, BPA would carry out road construction and improvement activities along a 4.9-mile-long route between transmission structures on the Spar Canyon-Round Valley No. 1 transmission line under an amended right-of-way from BLM. BPA would construct the service road by blading an approximate 14-foot wide road bed, removing the topsoil and vegetation, adding drainage dips or swales on steep slopes, and developing 16 rocked ford crossings at ephemeral drainages. In addition, areas disturbed by construction activities outside

the permanent road bed would be reclaimed through seeding, revegetation, and erosion control and BPA would relinquish existing segments of service routes on BLM land that are not needed.

The project would allow BPA safe and reliable access to its Spar Canyon-Round Valley No. 1 transmission line to perform maintenance and make emergency repairs. Construction would likely begin in summer 2019 and take about two months. Details on the Proposed Action appear in Chapter 2 of the EA.

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

Under the No Action Alternative, BPA would not construct a service road. In addition, BPA would not receive an amended right-of-way from BLM for service roads not currently authorized by BLM. This would limit BPA's ability to maintain transmission structures on a routine basis or make timely emergency line repairs. Obtaining access to these structures in an emergency could result in adverse impacts to soils, vegetation, and wildlife habitat. In addition, the resulting delay reduces system reliability and negatively affects BPA's utility customers with longer outages.

SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS FROM THE PROPOSED ACTION

To determine whether the Proposed Action has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts of this alternative on human and natural resources were evaluated and presented in Chapter 3 of the EA.

As described in Chapter 3 of the EA, the following resources and issues are not present in the project area and therefore would not be affected by the Proposed Action: environmental justice populations, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, floodplains, forest resources, mineral resources, paleontological resources, prime and unique farmlands, wetlands and riparian zones, hazardous and solid waste, wild and scenic rivers, Wild Horse and Burro habitat management areas, and wilderness study areas.

The following discussion summarizes the reasons the Proposed Action's potential impacts would not be significant.

Access and Transportation - Construction traffic would not substantially affect the normal use of area roads and Highway 93 due to the small number and short duration of use for the construction vehicles. BLM's designation of about 4.1 miles of the BPA service-road for public use could increase public access and use of BLM land in the project area. However, the area is currently accessible to the public and this addition of 4.1 miles of road for public use would represent a slight increase over the existing 2,217 miles of road designated for public use under the BLM Challis Field Office Travel Management Plan.

Soils - Potential erosion due to the removal, relocation, and compaction of soil from construction equipment and road development would be mitigated with the implementation of

Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as revegetating disturbed areas along road-bed shoulders and installing appropriate drainage features. In addition, rock placement in fords would help hold soil in place at the ephemeral drainages.

Vegetation - The vegetation that would be removed or disturbed, approximately 12 acres, would be a desert-scrub vegetation community common to the local area and region. The special-status plant species in the general project area would be flagged as necessary to help prevent possible disturbance during construction. To help minimize vegetation loss, the road edges would be reseeded with a native seed.

Invasive and Non-Native Species - Although road construction and ford development would open areas to the potential spread of invasive and noxious weed species that are already present in the project area, implementation of mitigation measures and BMPs—such as utilizing wash stations to ensure that undercarriages of construction vehicles and equipment are clear of soil and plant material and seeding disturbed areas in the project area—would minimize possible weed spread.

Wildlife - Construction would cause temporary noise and increased human presence over existing conditions that would affect wildlife in the project area. This has the potential for vehicle strikes and may result in short-term wildlife behavior modifications. Constructing the service road would result in permanent loss of 12 acres of habitat used by migratory birds and raptors, and result in the same amount of acreage loss for pronghorn-antelope and mule-deer habitat used for foraging in winter months. This affected acreage that provides pronghorn and mule-deer habitat equals less than .05 percent of winter range in the area. To minimize these potential impacts, BPA would limit construction to summer and early fall months to avoid migratory-bird nesting and winter-range season. In addition, BPA would follow reasonable speed limits to reduce the risk of strikes.

Due to a lack of suitable habitat, there are no ESA-listed wildlife species expected to be present in the project area, thus the Proposed Action would not affect ESA-listed species or their designated critical habitat.

Greater Sage-Grouse - Although the project area lacks suitable habitat characteristics for Greater Sage-Grouse, the area is designated by BLM under the applicable Resource Management Plan as an Important Habitat Management Area with the potential to provide sage-grouse winter habitat. Because the road work would remove 4.44 acres of this designated habitat, BPA will fund efforts to enhance and conserve Greater-Sage Grouse habitat within a 10-acre off-site area to mitigate impacts and achieve a net conservation gain.

Waterways and Water Quality - Erosion from project activities under the Proposed Action would not be measurable above background levels. Implementing soil-erosion BMPs and mitigation measures would reduce the potential for erosion and runoff during construction activities.

Visual Resources - Based on the visual-contrast rating conducted for the Proposed Action, the landscape would partially retain the existing character of the landscape, which is consistent with the objectives for a BLM Visual Resource Management Class II landscape.

Air Quality and Greenhouse Gases - Construction equipment would increase local emissions of criteria pollutants during construction, primarily in the form of particulate matter from dust. Implementing dust-abatement BMPs during construction would reduce this impact. These impacts would be localized and relatively minor compared to existing conditions, and not have the potential to exceed air-quality standards.

Using construction vehicles and permanently removing vegetation would contribute to greenhouse-gas emissions, but the resulting emissions of 94 metric tons from the Proposed Action would be a minor contributor to greenhouse gas levels.

Socioeconomics, Noise, Public Health, and Safety - The Proposed Action would have a minimal positive impact on the Custer County economy from potential employment of up to 10 workers and project expenditures during the short construction duration.

The scale and duration of service-road construction would minimally alter the population of Custer County because construction workers would commute or seek short-term housing. It would also have minimal effect on public services because water supplies for construction activities are not expected to affect local water supplies and the increases in traffic from construction would not result in measureable traffic delays or affect local school-bus routes.

Noise from construction traffic would temporarily add to existing noise levels. It would be temporary, intermittent, and not much higher than existing levels.

There would be a minimal public health and safety risk because BPA will follow appropriate construction-safety procedures to minimize that risk.

Cultural resources - Because BPA adjusted the proposed service road route to avoid the one archaeological site identified by a project-area survey as potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, there would be no impact to potentially eligible historic properties.

Tribal Treaty Rights and Interests - Because there would be no change from the current condition to the affected resources associated with tribal treaty rights and interests reserved in the project area, the Proposed Action would not result in a significant impact to tribal treaty rights and interests.

Fish - Based on the lack of species presence, lack of suitable habitat in the project area, and the implementation of BMPs to reduce runoff that may carry sediment off the project area, the

Proposed Action would have no impact on fish. No ESA-listed fish species occur within the project area, thus there would be no impact to ESA-listed fish or designated critical habitat.

Recreation - Overall recreational use would remain nearly the same as it is now and effects to recreation from implementation of the Proposed Action would be minimal. Recreationists may experience some temporary effects from the intermittent and temporary noise from construction as described above.

Rangelands - Removing approximately 12 acres of vegetation would reduce rangeland availability by the equivalent of one Animal Unit Month, equivalent to the loss of one cow-and-calf pair for one month, which is negligible in the context of overall grazing practices in the BLM grazing allotment.

DETERMINATION

Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, and the implementation of the MAP, BPA determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA (42 USC 4321 *et seq.*). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

/s/ Peter T. Cogswell
Peter T. Cogswell
Vice President, Acting
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September 24, 2018
Date