

3.20 SIGNIFICANT UNAVOIDABLE ADVERSE EFFECTS

A summary of all impacts and mitigation measures is located in Chapter 2 of this Draft EIS. This section describes the unavoidable adverse effects caused by the Proposed Action and Action Alternatives that would remain after applying the proposed mitigation measures (see summary of mitigation measures is provided in Chapter 2). Where feasible, suggested mitigation measures are proposed to be incorporated into the facility planning and design to substantially eliminate the adverse impacts. In other cases, adverse impacts can be reduced but not eliminated and are therefore determined to be unavoidable. Most unavoidable adverse impacts would occur during the construction phase of the Proposed Action or Alternative Actions and would be temporary.

Unavoidable adverse effects related to Proposed Action and Action Alternatives construction would last only as long as the construction period, and would include the following:

- Soil compaction, erosion, vegetation degradation, and stream sedimentation.
- Disturbance to wetland buffer vegetation and soil.
- Disturbance to and displacement of some species of wildlife.
- Disturbance to nearby residents.
- Traffic delays in some areas.
- Minor air quality impacts due to fugitive dust.

Unavoidable adverse effects related to Proposed Action and Action Alternatives operations would last at least as long as the life of the project (an expected 40 years) and would include the following:

- The addition to the visual landscape of wind turbines and transmission lines.
- Habitat fragmentation.
- Adverse impacts to wildlife and wildlife habitat (including special status species) due to project-related changes to creek beds, wetland fill and floodplain encroachment, and the removal of trees and other vegetation.

3.21 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL SHORT-TERM USES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LONG-TERM PRODUCTIVITY

Activities associated with wind energy development that could be considered to be short-term uses of the environment would include those activities that would occur during construction activities (e.g., use of lay-down areas and overland roads). Environmental impacts during construction would be relatively short term (9 to 12 months) and would be mitigated by Project Design Features (PDFs), Best Management Practices (BMPs) and stipulations, including requirements for habitat restoration. Construction of the Echanis Project would begin in 2011 and last approximately 9 to 12 months, depending on weather and site conditions. The impacts to the environment during operations would constitute long-term uses of the environment; however, these uses would not conflict with relevant land use plans administered by BLM, USFWS and Harney County. The impacts of short-term use during decommissioning also would be mitigated by required habitat restoration activities, thereby rendering the land suitable for other uses.

The Proposed Action and Action Alternatives could result in favorable short-term and long-term effects for the local and regional economies in Harney County (see Section 3.11). These benefits include the creation of new jobs and increased regional income, sales and income tax revenues, and ROW rental receipts to the federal government.

3.22 IRREVERSIBLE AND IRRETRIEVABLE COMMITMENT OF RESOURCES

The development of the Echanis Wind Energy Project on BLM, USFWS and private lands would result in the consumption of sands, gravels, and other geologic resources, as well as fuel, structural steel, and other materials. Upon decommissioning, some of these materials would be available for reuse. Water resources also would be consumed during the construction and, to a lesser extent, decommissioning phases. These would be temporary uses and would be largely limited to on-site mixing of concrete and dust abatement activities.

In general, the impact to biological resources would not constitute an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources. During construction, operation, and decommissioning, individual animals would be affected. For most species, effects would be unlikely; however, effects are possible for some species. Site-specific and species-specific analyses conducted at the Project level for all project phases would help ensure that the potential for such impacts would be minimized to the fullest extent possible. While habitat would be impacted during construction and decommissioning, the restoration of habitat required by the PDFs and BMPs would reduce these impacts over time. The PDFs and BMPs are listed in Appendix A.

The proposed Project would travel through lightly populated areas that are frequently accessed by tourists and recreational visitors. Construction and operation of the Project would result in impacts to visual resource in specific locations. Upon decommissioning, visual resources in the area would be restored to their previous state.