



Soda Mountain Fiber Optic Project

HUNTER COMMUNICATIONS RIGHT-OF-WAY GRANT

The Medford District of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is currently evaluating an application from Hunter Communications, Inc. for a new right-of-way grant (OR 068168) to install fiber optic cable that will connect a communication office located in Ashland, Oregon with the telecommunication towers located at the communications site on the top of Soda Mountain within the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM). The term of the requested easement will be for 30 years.

BACKGROUND

The Soda Mountain Communications Site is located on public land and administered by the BLM, Medford District Office. It is a long-standing, established site that serves a large and varied population over a broad geographic region encompassing Southwest Oregon and Northern California. Soda Mountain functions as a vital link in the communications industry. The various authorized holders who currently operate at the site provide an array of services, including emergency 911 service; fire detection/reporting; commercial and public radio and television broadcasting; microwave and internet data links; telephone transmissions; and other uses.

In 2000, the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument was reserved in recognition of its remarkable ecology and to protect a diverse range of biological, geological, aquatic, archeological and historic objects. The Soda Mountain Wilderness (SMW) was added to the National Wilderness Preservation System on March 30, 2009. The Soda Mountain Communications Site is within the CSNM and is surrounded on all sides by the SMW.

The Soda Mountain Communications Site was recognized as a valid existing right in the *Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument Record of Decision/Resource Management Plan* (2008) (CSNM ROD/RMP) (VER-5, page 117). The CSNM ROD/RMP also identified that a comprehensive communications site management plan addressing site efficiency, visual resources, and the impacts of technology would be developed (VER-6, page 117). The BLM completed the *Soda Mountain Communications Site Management Plan* in August 2012.

The *Soda Mountain Communications Site Management Plan* (2012) allows for a new right-of-way grant to be issued “[i]f additional telephone service is ever deemed necessary or expanded at the site (page 19).” Special resource coordination considerations with on-site or adjacent resource values must be consistent with the CSNM ROD/RMP (2008) and the *Soda Mountain Wilderness Final Stewardship Plan* (2012).

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

The Soda Mountain Fiber Optic Project would place 24-count fiber optic cable both on existing utility poles and underground. The proposed alignment would connect with an existing fiber optic cable that is located on utility poles currently ending at the intersection of Road 39-2E-34 and Buckhorn Springs Road to the United States Cellular Corporation (USCC) tower which is located on the top of Soda Mountain. This proposed project would cross several BLM properties both outside and within the CSNM (Map 1).

The total length of aerial (on utility poles) fiber optic cable placement on BLM property would be approximately 8,243 feet (5,100 feet would be located within the CSNM and 3,143 feet would be outside the CSNM). The total length of underground fiber optic cable (including that within the Soda Mountain Communications Site) would be approximately 7,996 feet and would be placed within the road prism of BLM Roads 39-3E-32.3 (Soda Mountain Road), 40-3E-21.1 and 40-3E-21.2 (Soda Mountain Lookout Road) (Map 1).

To install the fiber optic cable onto the existing utility poles, the crew would climb each pole and attach a three bolt mechanism to the pole. A steel strand would then be pulled through this mechanism followed by the fiber optic cable. The fiber optic cable would be lashed to the strand and then pulled to tighten it to its final sag elevation. The three bolt mechanism would then be secured so the cable is held in place.

For the underground portion, a backhoe/excavator would be used to dig a trench 2 feet wide by 2 feet deep. The conduit for the fiber optic cable would then be placed in the trench, the soil backfilled and compacted. If excessive rock is encountered, a rock saw may need to be used. Along the alignment, four



vaults (18 inches by 24 inches by 24 inches deep) would be installed flush with the ground to allow access and long-term maintenance of the fiber optic line. Each vault would require the excavation of a hole approximately 3 feet by 3 feet by 2 feet deep.

Installation of three other vaults is proposed within the communications site area, in order to facilitate the current tower owners upgrading technology in the future to use the fiber optics. By using the fiber optic technology in the future, existing communications site users may be able to reduce their visual impact within the monument and wilderness by removing large microwave antennas.

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

We are now in the scoping phase of the environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This means that any comments you have and choose to submit will be used to develop issues, mitigation measures and alternatives. Comments that clearly articulate site-specific suggestions, issues or concerns are the most useful.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment -- including your personal identifying information -- may be made publicly available at

Map 1. Soda Mountain Fiber Optic Project

any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. We will make all submissions from organizations or businesses, available for public disclosure in their entirety.

Although you will be provided with an additional opportunity to make further comments upon completion of the environmental assessment, we are requesting your input now so that it can be considered early in the planning process.

We look forward to working with you throughout the process. Please submit your comments by Tuesday, June 30, 2015. Your comments should be mailed to Kristi Mastrofini at the following address.

Bureau of Land Management
Ashland Resource Area
3040 Biddle Road
Medford, OR 97504

WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT FOR TECHNICAL INFORMATION ON THIS PROJECT?

Please contact Kathy Minor, Project Leader, at 541.618.2245 or Tanya Dent, Realty Specialist, at 541.618.2477 for clarification or additional information.

