

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT, FONSI AND DECISION RECORD

BLM, Bishop Field Office
351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100
Bishop, CA 93514

EA Number: DOI-BLM-CA-070-2009-0029-EA

Lease/Serial/Case File No.: CACA 033373 (ROW Amendment)

Proposed Action Title/Type: Alltel Antelope Mtn Comm Site Upgrade

Location of Proposed Action: MDM, T. 1 S., R. 31 E.,
Section 4, SE1/4NE1/4;
Section 15, NW1/4;
Section 16, NE1/4SE1/4.

Applicant (if any): Alltel Communications, LLC.

Plan Conformance:

The proposed action is subject to the Bishop Resource Management Plan, approved March 25, 1993. The proposed action has been reviewed and is in conformance with the plan.

Under the 1993 Bishop RMP General Policies, Page 8, No.1; "Management will be on the basis of multiple use and sustained yield as per FLPMA section 102 (a)(7)." As part of the multiple-use and sustained yield, the BLM can authorize Rights-of-Way and associated amendments (FLPMA section 501(a)(1-7)) for facilities such as pipelines, roads, power lines, wells, and other facilities on the public lands for the public good.

Need for Proposed Action:

In 1993, a communication site right-of-way (ROW) was granted for the installation of a cellular site located at Antelope Mountain Peak, California. This site had a 40 foot tower and was powered by solar panels with battery backup. The current configuration of the site does not allow for complete night-time operation due to the power system. In addition, the tower height and low power signals do not allow for optimum cell phone coverage of the local area.

Alltel has requested that the existing ROW grant be amended for increasing the tower height by 20 feet, increasing the solar panel array, adding a larger equipment shelter, and installing a propane-run generator. This change in equipment would allow for improved cellular coverage and a system that can operate 24 hours a day. This would enhance Alltel's service to their cellular customers.

Description of Proposed Action: Alternative A

The proposed action would be to amend an existing ROW grant for upgrading a communication site at Antelope Mountain.

The upgrade would consist of; adding a 20' section to the existing 40' lattice tower, upgrading the tower footings, adding a 12' by 24' equipment shelter with propane generator, installing two 6' by 11' solar panels on a steel frame, adding (4) 1000 gallon propane tanks, chain link fencing the perimeter, and increasing the ROW footprint from 2500 sq ft to 3500 sq ft. See Exhibit A, B, and C.

The construction would include the use of pickups trucks, flatbed trucks, and backhoe. The use of torches or welding equipment would be used. Contractors would carry fire extinguishers, water, and shovels etc for fire safety. Contractors have been notified of potential fire during windy events.

Increasing the site area size would result in removal of 4 bitterbrush shrubs, 2 sage brushes, and one small pinyon pine. No other vegetation exists within the proposed action area.

Access to the site would have to be improved due to the extremely rocky condition of the existing dirt road. Any rocks within the roadway would be removed either by hand or by backhoe. No blading would be allowed. Rocks would be tossed into the surrounding vegetation. This improvement would take place on 3,000 feet of road located in Sections 15 and 16. There would be an option to fill certain areas, but it would not be expected to be used due to costs.

Construction activities would take place after June 1 and would continue for 6 weeks. Contractors may choose to camp on-site due to the travel distance back to Bishop and the poor road quality.

Standard cultural stipulations (stop construction if cultural resources are encountered and seek BLM direction before resuming work) and weed prevention techniques (wash all equipment prior to entering public land) would be applied.

No Action: Alternative B

Under this alternative, the communication site would not be authorized. Although the site does operate on a daily basis, the lack of reliable power and low tower height reduces the cell coverage area and prohibits 24 hour reliability. Customers would continue to experience call drops and there is a potential safety issue with unreliable cell coverage for the area.

Affected Environment/Environmental Impacts: Alternative A

The proposed action is not within a Wilderness, Wilderness Study Area, Area of Critical Environmental Concern, nor Wild and Scenic River corridor, and there would be no effects on any lands so designated.

There would be no impact to listed species or habitat. There are no known sensitive species or habitats within the proposed action area. See Vegetation and Wildlife Section.

There would be no impacts to prime farm lands, flood plains, or water quality (including ground or surface waters). The proposed action would not occur in areas having these characteristics.

There would be no disproportionate impacts to low income or minority groups, per Executive Order 12898 (2/11/94). There are no known groups of this type that utilize the proposed action area.

Air Quality

Air quality would not be affected. The rocky condition of the road would not result in measureable dust emissions. The proposed action is not within a federal nonattainment designated area.

Cultural resources

Cultural resources were evaluated for the project by the Bishop Field Office during March 31, 2009 and May 6, 2009 and documented under Cultural Resource Inventory Report CA-170-09-24. The No cultural resources were located within the Area of Potential Effect (APE). There would be no impact to known historic or prehistoric cultural resources from the project construction activities or road improvement.

Visual resources

The Visual Resource Management Class for the proposed action area is VRM Class III. Class III is defined as contrasts to the basic elements caused by a management activity may be evident and begin to attract attention in the characteristic landscape but should remain subordinate to the existing landscape.

The Key Observation Points (KOP) are along Highway 6 about 5 miles north of the center of Benton (KOP 1) and along Highway 120 on the north end of Adobe Valley (KOP 2). KOP 1 is 5 miles east of Antelope Mtn. and KOP 2 is 4 miles northwest of Antelope Mtn.

The proposed action area is Antelope Mtn. peak at the elevation of 7,617 feet. This peak is about 2,000 feet above KOP 1 and about 1,000 feet above KOP 2. The peak is

treed with 15-20 foot high pinyon. The current tower is 20 above the existing vegetation and cannot be seen from either KOPs, due to the sight distances of over 4 miles and existing trees.

It is expected that the addition of 20 feet to the tower would not result in a change in the visual impact. The tower would not be seen from either KOPs due to sight distances of over 4 miles. The proposed action meets the Class III standard.

Vegetation

Vegetation within the general project area consists of an over-story of pinyon and juniper trees with an understory of bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*), basin big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*), and some needlegrass (*Achnatherum* spp). Ratios of trees, shrubs and grasses cover is 50% trees, 45% shrubs, 5% grasses. The immediate area where the construction would take place consists of 95% bare ground with 6 shrubs and one tree.

Impacts of the proposed action would include permanent removal of approximately 4 bitterbrush shrubs, 2 basin big sagebrush and one pinyon tree along the perimeter of the existing site. This would be an unavoidable impact due to equipment placement. Due to the general lack of vegetation at the existing communication site, there would be no site rehabilitation required.

Invasive, non-native species

There are no invasive, non-native plant species within the proposed action area. It is possible that noxious weed seeds could be transported to the construction area unless noxious weed control measures are implemented.

Wildlife habitat

No sensitive, threatened or endangered species exist in the proposed action area. The proposed action area is not in Greater sage-grouse habitat. The proposed action would not impact sage-grouse habitat or populations.

The proposed action area is habitat to various birds, small mammals, and insects. It is expected that there would be displacement of these resident species and/or destruction of habitat for these species during the construction phase of the project. This would be an unavoidable impact to these species.

The proposed action area is within winter range for the Casa Diablo mule deer herd. The RMP requires seasonal protection from 11/1 to 4/30. The proposed action would take place after June 1 and be completed by July 15. This activity would be outside the seasonal protection period. It is expected that any summer resident deer currently utilizing the area would be displaced during the day and when construction was active.

This would be a temporary slight impact to mule deer utilizing the immediate area. This would not measurably impact the herd as a whole. The loss of 4 bitterbrush plants during construction would not measurably impact the mule deer habitat as a whole or fragment any existing habitat in the area. This would be an unavoidable impact.

The proposed action area is not within pronghorn habitat. No impact to pronghorn would occur.

Minerals

There are no known mining claims or mineral material sites in the proposed project area. No impact to minerals.

Economic Impacts

Viability of the Proposed Development

The project is considered to be viable and funded by a major tele-communications company.

Impacts to the Community and to Tribal Interests

Impacts to the community and to Tribal interests would be an improvement in cellular communication both in quality and 24 hour service.

Environmental Justice

The proposed action area is located about 7 miles north of the Benton Piute Indian Reservation. This community has been in existence for over 80 years and typically has a lower than average income level when measured against Mono County averages. The proposed action area is part of the area where the Tribe would have cultural concerns if the tower would be visible from the reservation. The tower can not be seen from the reservation due to a high mountain ridge which blocks any view of the tower from the reservation.

Hazardous Materials

No impact

Consistency with County Planning

The county currently does not have any plans which either locates or shows demand for communication facilities within the County. Considering that the County Sheriff's Department has a radio repeater at Antelope Mtn, indicates that the County identified the peak as a viable communication area.

Impacts to County Infrastructure

N.A.

Impact to the Local Community

It is expected that the impact to the local community would be limited, but cellular communication service would improve within the Benton community and possibly safety aspects of this improvement would be realized.

Adherence to Local, State and Federal Environmental Ordinances / Laws

The project is in adherence to Local, State and Federal Environmental Ordinances and laws.

Land Uses / Realty / Rights-of-way

No impact.

Global Climate Change

United States Department of Interior, Order Number 3226, signed January 19, 2001, Evaluating Climate Change Impacts in Management Planning, is an order to ensure that climate change impacts are taken into account in connection with planning and decision making. Climate change refers to any significant change in measures of climate (e.g. temperature or precipitation) lasting for an extended period of time (decades or longer). Climate change may result from: natural processes, such as changes in the sun's intensity, natural processes within the climate system (e.g. changes in ocean circulation); human activities that change the atmosphere's composition (e.g. burning fossil fuels) and the land surface (e.g. urbanization) (IPCC, 2007).

Changes in the atmosphere have likely influenced temperature, precipitation, storms, and sea level (IPCC, 2007). Rising greenhouse gases (GHG) levels are likely contributing to global climate change. In the eastern Sierra region of California, climate change may result in warmer, drier conditions, and potentially more extreme weather events.

The proposed action would result in the some emissions of GHG from construction equipment diesel fuel exhaust. Current regulations and standards in regards to GHG have not been developed and finalized, nor have GHG emissions been quantified, in a reliable scientific based relationship, to the eastern Sierra regional climate in order to determine the potential impact on the local and regional climate. The overall contribution to GHG emissions is considered quantitatively small to overall state GHG emissions, the impacts of the proposed project on global climate change would be considered insignificant, but an unavoidable impact. It cannot be determined to a

reasonable degree of certainty that the proposed project would result in a considerable incremental contribution to a significant cumulative impact of global climate change.

Environmental Impacts: Alternative B

Under this alternative, the proposed action resource impacts identified under Alternative A would not take place. The existing cellular site would not be upgraded. The site would continue to be operated at low power with reduced signal strength and coverage. Night time operation would be limited or non-existent. Local service would not improve and may become or continue to be a safety issue.

GHG emissions from equipment use would be eliminated.

Cumulative Impacts of Alternative A – Proposed Action

The proposed project would result in a permanent loss of 6 shrubs and one tree in suitable mule deer habitat. This loss would not measurably impact mule deer habitat and therefore does not represent a fracturing of habitat. Mule deer habitat adjacent to the proposed action is intact and is expected to continue to provide mule deer winter range. The shrub loss as a cumulative impact would not adversely impact local mule deer habitat or mule deer population.

Cumulative impacts to Global Warming cannot be determined due to the lack of reliable relational information required to gauge the project's affects on the local and regional atmospheric levels.

Description of Mitigation Measures and Residual Impacts:

1. Spray or wash all equipment used during construction or hauling prior to entering public land to remove debris which may contain noxious weeds.
2. Apply standard ROW archeological stipulations to the proposed project.

Residual impacts include the permanent loss of 6 shrubs and the elimination of potential weed expansion.

Implementation Monitoring:

The BLM realty specialist would monitor the construction and the BLM botanist would monitor the project for noxious weed problems.

Persons/Agencies Consulted:

Doug Wittrock
Leslie Gorey
Mike Onley
Kenneth Umlang

Verticom, Inc, Permitting Contractor, Field Rep
Verticom, Inc. Permitting Contractor
Wilson Construction, Inc.
Team Communications, LLC

Literature Cited:

None

Preparer(s):

Larry Primosch	BLM, Realty Specialist
Anne Halford	BLM, Botanist
Greg Haverstock	BLM, Archeologist
Steve Nelson	BLM, Supervisory Natural Resource Specialist

Date: June 10, 2009

/s/ by James Jennings, Acting June 10, 2009

Reviewed By: _____ **Date:** _____
Environmental Coordinator

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT/DECISION RECORD

I have reviewed this environmental assessment DOI-BLM-CA-070-2009-0029-EA for the Alltel Communications, LLC proposal for upgrading the Antelope Mountain cellular site including the explanation and resolution of any potentially significant environmental impacts.

I have determined that the proposed project is in conformance with the Bishop Resource Management Plan, which was approved March 25, 1993. This plan has been reviewed, and the proposed action conforms with the land use plan terms and conditions as required by 43 CFR 1610.5.

I have determined that the proposed action with the mitigation measures described below will not have any significant impacts on the human environment and that an EIS is not required. The overall contribution to GHG emissions is considered quantitatively small to overall state GHG emissions, the impacts of the proposed project on global climate change would be considered insignificant, but an unavoidable impact. Cumulative impacts to Global Warming cannot be determined due to the lack of reliable relational information required to gauge the project's affects on the local and regional atmospheric levels.

There would be no effect on threatened or endangered species as a result of the action.

It is my decision to implement the project with the mitigation measures identified below.

The proposed project would result in a permanent loss of six shrubs within suitable winter habitat for the Casa Diablo mule deer. This loss will not result in fracturing the available habitat in the area nor contribute to a decline of habitat or the mule deer population.

It is in the public interest to allow the upgrade of the Alltel cellular site so that Alltel Communication, LLC can continue to provide needed cellular service to the Benton community and the general public traveling on Highway 6 and Highway 120. The upgrade would improve cellular signals and coverage at the site and would improve public safety.

Mitigation Measures/Remarks:

1. Spray or wash all equipment used during construction or hauling prior to entering public land to remove debris which may contain noxious weeds.
2. Any cultural and/or paleontological resource (historic or prehistoric site or object) discovered by the holder, or any person working on his behalf, on public or Federal land shall be immediately reported to the authorized officer. Holder shall suspend all operations in the immediate area of such discovery until written

authorization to proceed is issued by the authorized officer. An evaluation of the discovery will be made by the authorized officer to determine appropriate actions to prevent the loss of significant cultural or scientific values. The holder will be responsible for the cost of evaluation and any decision as to proper mitigation measures will be made by the authorized officer after consulting with the holder.

/s/ by F. Kirk Halford

June 11, 2009

Authorized Official: _____ **Date** _____
Acting Field Manager, Bishop Field Office