

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
COLORADO RIVER VALLEY FIELD OFFICE
SILT, COLORADO

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2013-0064

Case File Serial Number: COC075915

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

I have reviewed the direct, indirect and cumulative effects of the proposed activities documented in the Xcel Rifle to Parachute 230kV Transmission Line EA, No. **DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2013-0064**. I have also reviewed the project record for this analysis and the impacts of the proposed action and alternatives as disclosed in the Alternatives and Environmental Impacts sections of the EA. Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. Because there would not be any significant impact, an environmental impact statement is not required.

APPROVAL:

Recommended By:



Monte Senor, Realty Specialist

6/25/2014
Date

Approved By:



Karl Mendonca, Associate Field Manager

6/25/2014
Date

DECISION RECORD

DOI-BLM-CO-N040-2013-0064

FINAL DECISION: It is my decision to authorize the Proposed Action of the Xcel Rifle to Parachute 230kV Transmission Line project with the proposed mitigation measures as identified below.

RATIONALE: The proposed project is consistent with the current land use plan. This decision does not authorize the initiation of construction activities on BLM lands. Such activities will be authorized only upon issuance by BLM of a right-of-way (ROW) grant and Temporary Use Permit (TUP) for portions of the Transmission line on BLM lands. The following mitigation measures are included in my decision to eliminate or reduce environmental impacts that have been identified in this EA.

MITIGATION MEASURES and DESIGN FEATURES:

Access and Transportation

The following design feature would be used to mitigate impacts to existing roads and avoid the need for new roads:

- Existing access roads used for installation of the transmission line and structures would be maintained and restored to preconstruction conditions following completion of work.
- Public notice and signs would be used for any road closures or detours required during construction.
- Any existing routes that are improved to install or maintain the power line that are not a part of the designated route system would be blocked to prevent public access. The routes would need to be blocked using gates, boulders or other approved structures.
- Helicopters would be used for transmission line structure installation where no existing access routes are present.

Air Quality

To minimize fugitive dust production, a BLM approved dust suppressant would be used along access roads as needed during construction activities. Construction equipment and vehicles would not be left idling for excessive periods.

Cultural Resources

Where feasible, all historic properties would be avoided by ground disturbing actions, using existing access roads and siting structures to avoid adverse effects. Because of the flexibility in placing the transmission line structures, it is anticipated that all eligible historic and prehistoric sites can be avoided during construction. The visual impact of a new transmission line also would be minimized by use of non-reflective steel poles for structures to reduce visibility.

Although the preferred mitigation measure is avoidance, for those historic properties that cannot be avoided a treatment plan would be written and included under a memorandum of agreement (MOA) that would be developed between the BLM, SHPO and participating signatories, if any, that could include interested Native American tribes if the property is archaeological in nature.

The Advisory Council on Historic Preservation would be invited to participate in the development of the MOA.

Any unexpected discoveries of human remains on federal or trust lands would be mitigated under provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act. In the event of an inadvertent discovery of human remains on non-federal lands, Colorado Statute 18-4-509: (Colorado's Historical, Prehistorical, and Archaeological Resources Act) 24-80, Part 13 would be followed.

Native American Religious Concerns

Based on tribal consultation, a request to include additional research of specific cultural resources was expressed by Tribal members and will be included in the mitigation of this project through the MOA.

Floodplains

If transmission line structures must be placed in the Colorado River floodplain, poles would be placed as far from the active channel as possible. Structure placement in wetlands or below the Ordinary High Water Mark would be avoided if possible and appropriate U.S. Army Corps of Engineer approvals secured prior to construction if impacts are unavoidable. Debris protection measures would be placed around poles to prevent flood damage. Regular inspection of the poles in the floodplain by PSCo would be conducted to remove debris and ensure the integrity of the structures.

Noise and Electromagnetic Interference

All motor vehicles and equipment would have mufflers conforming to original manufacturer specifications that are in good working order and are in constant operation to prevent excessive or unusual noise. Truck traffic would be routed away from sensitive noise areas where feasible. Work would be conducted in compliance with state noise statutes for construction activities in levels in industrial zones.

Invasive Non-Native Species (Noxious Weeds)

All construction equipment and vehicles involved in land disturbing actions would be free of noxious weed seeds or propagative parts prior to entry on site. When working in areas with noxious weeds, equipment would be cleaned prior to moving off site. Any weeds present in the pole construction locations would be treated prior to surface disturbing activities.

Plants: Sensitive, Threatened, Endangered

Placement of poles within potential or known habitat for sensitive species or communities would be avoided to the extent feasible (see Design Features section of the EA for details). A biological monitor would be present during all construction activities in occupied Harrington's beardtongue habitat to minimize impacts to this species and its habitat.

Plants: Vegetation, Wetlands, and Riparian Zones

Pole placement is flexible in most cases, and it is likely that poles can be situated to avoid most sensitive vegetation communities such as riparian areas and wetlands. PSCo would apply for a Section 404 permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers prior to construction if impacts to wetlands are unavoidable. An exception to this is the Colorado River, which has a broad

floodplain and riparian zone within the project area and likely cannot be completely avoided. All surface disturbances would be seeded with a mixture of native grasses adapted to the site to help prevent the invasion of noxious weeds and to reestablish native, perennial vegetation on the site. Any noxious weeds that become established in the project area would also be controlled by the applicant. The seed mixes are presented in the EA.

Recreation

In order to minimize impacts to visitors “Public Notices” would be posted at all main access and entry areas prior to construction. Notices would include when the project is occurring (starting and end date), why the project is being done, who is doing it, a map of where the work is occurring, and what exactly is being done. Construction work near popular hunting locations on public land would be limited to the extent possible during the fall (late September to mid-December) to minimize impact to recreational hunting.

Soils

Impacts to soil resources would be sufficiently mitigated by reseeded as described in the *Reclamation* section of the EA. Erosion risk would be managed by implementation of the Stormwater Management Plan.

Visual Resources

In order to maintain a natural looking landscape and comply with VRM Class II, III, and IV objectives, the following design features would be incorporated:

- Weathered steel structures would be used to reduce reflectivity and visibility.
- Thinning and feathering of adjacent vegetation would be incorporated when trimming vegetation adjacent to the transmission line. Proposed vegetation clearing would be minimal (maximum of 20 feet by 40 feet per pole structure). PSCo would coordinate with BLM to identify the location and extent of any vegetation clearing used to blend vegetation and maintain the natural lines of vegetation borders.
- Temporary disturbances would be reclaimed following construction.

Waste: Hazardous or Solid

All equipment on the project would be maintained in a clean and well-functioning state to avoid or minimize contamination from mechanical fluids. All equipment would be checked daily. Fuels and lubricants would be stored in appropriate containers and refueling would occur in designated areas at a minimum of 100 feet from any stream channels. A hazardous spill plan would be in place, stating what actions would be taken in the case of a spill, notification measures, and preventive measures to be implemented, such as the placement of refueling facilities, storage, and handling of hazardous materials.

Wildlife: Aquatic/Fisheries

Pole placement is flexible, and would be altered to avoid aquatic habitat or sensitive areas. Reclamation, including reseeded of disturbed areas, would occur as soon as possible following construction. In addition, the Stormwater Management Plan would prevent erosion/sedimentation effects into area drainages.

Wildlife: Migratory Birds

Clearing activities are proposed to occur outside the breeding season for migratory birds. Construction activities near known and active raptor nesting areas would occur outside the

breeding season for those raptors. Recommended seasonal and spatial buffer restrictions for activities near active nests, beyond those that have historically occurred in the project area (including driving on nearby roads, normal maintenance activities, etc), are as follows:

- Red-tailed hawk: Avoid 0.33 mile around active nests (nesting season is about February 15 to July 15).
- Golden eagle: Avoid 0.50 mile around active nests (nesting season is about December 15 to July 15).
- Bald eagle: Avoid 0.50 mile around active nests (nesting season is about October 15 to July 31).
- Osprey: Avoid 0.25 mile around active nests (nesting season is about April 1 to August 31). Note that many osprey nest in immediate proximity to human disturbance, such as interstate highways, towns, or ballfields. Active osprey nests within intensive human activity areas do not require seasonal avoidance.

Direct impacts to raptors include mortality due to electrocutions, collisions and nest construction. Following “Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Powerlines: State of the Art, 2006” (APLIC 2006) would reduce the likelihood of impacts from the powerline itself.

Wildlife: Sensitive, Threatened, and Endangered

PSCo’s Stormwater Management Plan and Reclamation Plan would minimize the risk of inadvertent discharge of sediment in waterways that support populations of greenback cutthroat trout, razorback sucker and Colorado pikeminnow.

Wildlife: Terrestrial

As described in the *Reclamation* section of the EA, all surface disturbances would be seeded with a mixture of native grasses adapted to the site to help prevent the invasion of noxious weeds and to reestablish native, perennial vegetation on the site. Any noxious weeds that become established in the project area would also be controlled by the applicant.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

PSCo hosted open houses to solicit comments on the proposed transmission line construction project on November 7th and 8th, 2012 in Rifle and Parachute respectively. An additional public meeting was held on March 5, 2013 in Rifle. Over 770 landowners (individual and business; see Appendix A for complete lists of landowners) within one-quarter mile of the alternative transmission line routes and various federal, state, and local agencies (see **Error! Reference source not found.** for agency mailing list) were sent notices of the proposed project and invited to attend the public meetings and provide comments. The meeting notice also was posted on the Xcel website (<http://www.xcelenergy.com/rifle-parachute>) and on BLM’s public notice website. In addition, articles announcing the November 2012 meetings were published in the following newspapers: Grand Junction Sentinel Nov. 3, 2012; Glenwood Post Independent Oct. 31, 2012 and Rifle Citizen Telegraph Nov. 1, 2012. About 50 to 60 members of the public and agency representatives participated in the public meetings. Two landowners expressed an interest in meeting with PSCo to discuss specific concerns. PSCo representatives met with those landowners in person during April 2013. Attendees were encouraged to sign in, given comment cards, and encouraged to submit comments in writing. BLM management was present to answer questions. Maps depicting the route alternatives of the proposed transmission line were available.

BLM received 17 written comments from the public, via comment cards from the open houses, letters, and emails. Participants at the public meetings also provided oral comments. Agency letters were received from Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

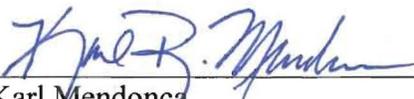
All comment letters were reviewed for substantive comments and concerns and issues were considered and addressed in the environmental analysis.

RIGHT OF APPEAL:

All of the documents supporting this decision are available for the review by the public. Appeal procedures for this decision are outlined in Title 43 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 4. In accordance with Title 43 CFR 4.410 any party to a case who is adversely affected by the decision of an officer of the Bureau of Land Management shall have a right to appeal to the Interior Board of Land Appeals (Board). The Notice of Appeal must be filed in the Bureau of Land Management office that issued the decision within 30 days after the date of service (43 CFR 4.411). Procedures for filing an appeal are described on BLM Form 1842-1.

NAME OF PREPARER: Monte Senior

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL



Karl Mendonca
Associate Field Manager

DATE: 6/25/2014