United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Finding of No Significant Impact
Environmental Assessment
DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2013-0045-EA

July, 2014

Tri-State Fiber Optic ROW

Location: New Mexico Principle Meridian, Colorado
T. 41 N., R. 7 W.,
sec. 19, SE1/4;
sec. 30, E1/2;
sec. 31, NE1/4, W1/2.

The areas described aggregate 3.0 acres.

Applicant/Address: Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc.
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BLM

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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Environmental Assessment

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Tri-State Fiber Optic ROW

INTRODUCTION:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has conducted an environmental analysis DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2013-0045-EA for a proposed action to address authorization of a Fiber Optic Cable Right-of-Way (ROW) to be added to the existing overhead 115 kV power line area in San Juan County. The project would authorize Tri-State to install Fiber Optic Cable for system communication and lease fibers to EAGLE-NET Alliance for use in providing broadband service to the schools and communities located at Durango Mountain Resort area and Silverton. Some improvements are needed for installation of the fiber optic cable, including minor improvements to a BLM access road. The underlying need for the proposal would be met while authorizing a 30 year term ROW for the addition of fiber optic cable to the existing 115 kV transmission line, owned and operated by Tri-State. Authorization of the fiber optic ROW would allow broadband internet to reach the town of Silverton and rural communities near Durango Mountain Resort.

The Tri State Fiber Optic ROW EA# DOI-BLM-CO-S010-2013-0045-EA is available at the Tres Rios Field Office, is incorporated by reference for this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). A no action alternative and proposed action alternative were analyzed in the EA.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT:

Based upon a review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project as described in the proposed action (Selected Action) 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. No environmental effects meet the definition of significance in context or intensity as defined in 40 CFR 1508.27 and do not exceed those effects described in the San Juan /San Miguel RMP/FEIS. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not needed.

This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described:

Context: The project is a site-specific action directly involving approximately 3.0 acres of BLM administered land that by itself does not have international, national, regional, or state-wide importance.

Intensity: The following discussion is organized around the Ten Significance Criteria described in 40 CFR 1508.27.

The following have been considered in evaluating intensity for this proposal:

1. **Impacts may be both beneficial and adverse**. The proposed action would impact resources as beneficially and adversely as described in the EA. Mitigating measures to reduce impacts from noxious weeds were incorporated in the design of the action alternatives. None of the environmental effects discussed in detail in the EA and associated appendices are considered significant, nor do the effects exceed those described in the San Juan/San Miguel FEIS.

2. **The degree to which the selected alternative will affect public health or safety**. The proposed action is designed to allow the safe installation of approximately 2 miles of fiber optic cable. The health and safety of the general public would not be affected. The health and safety of the contractors is careful managed through Tri-State's operations plan.

3. **Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas**. The historic and cultural resources of the area have been inventoried and no resources potentially eligible for listing or currently listed on the National Register were found present. The following components of the Human Environment and Resource Issues are not affected because they are not present in the project area (rationale in parenthesis): Air Quality (negligible effect), Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (not present), Greenhouse Gas Emissions (negligible effect), Environmental Justice (No minority or low-income groups would be disproportionately affected by health or environmental effects, none are present), Farmlands (No Farmlands near the project area), Fish Habitat (No streams will be impacted), Floodplains (none are present), Forest Resources (Negligible effects), Fuels/Fire Management (no impacts), Invasive Species/ Noxious Weeds (Mitigation measures and stipulations identified in the proposed action would prevent spread or introduction of noxious weeds), Lands/Access (Mitigation measures addressed in the proposed action would result in no impact to lands/access), Lands with Wilderness Characteristics (not present), Migratory Birds (Vegetation will be cleared outside peak nesting season or after a migratory bird clearance), Geology (no impacts), Oil and Gas (not present), Solid Minerals (no impact), Native American Religious and other Concerns (presence is unknown), Paleontology (Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal ground disturbance activities would result in negligible impacts to paleontology resources), Rangeland Health Standards (not within an active grazing allotment), Recreation (While work may displace some amount of recreational use that occurs in the area, there would be no closures (temporary or otherwise) which would block public access. Additionally, the limited scope and duration of the work on BLM managed lands would make negligible any impacts to recreational use and enjoyment of the area.), Socio-Economics (Providing Broadband to the town of Silverton could have positive socio-economic impacts), Soils (Mitigation identified in the proposed action combined with minimal ground disturbance activities would result in negligible impacts to soil resources.), Special Status Animal Species (Habitat may be available but disturbance is all existing except 0.6 acres), Special Status

Plant Species (no known populations of BLM sensitive plants in the project area), Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Animal Species (project has been pre-screened by the FWS and BLM), Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Plant Species (no known populations within the project area), Vegetation Excluding USFW Designated (negligible effects), Visual Resources (There would be no new disturbances which would result in any contrasts to the existing characteristic landscape.), Wastes (No solid waste or hazardous material is associated with the nature of the proposed action.), Water Resources/Quality (No developed drinking water sources occur within the proposed project), Wild Horses and Burros (not present), Wild and Scenic Rivers (not present), Wilderness/WSA (not present), Wildlife-aquatic (no impact), Wildlife-terrestrial (temporary displacement), Wetlands/Riparian Zones (no impact).

4. **The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial**. There is no scientific controversy over the nature of the impacts.

5. **The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks**. The project is not unique or unusual. The BLM has experience implementing similar actions in similar areas. The environmental effects to the human environment are fully analyzed in the EA. There are no predicted effects on the human environment that are considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

6. **The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.** The actions considered in the selected alternative were considered by the interdisciplinary team within the context of past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete analysis of the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the selected alternative and all other alternatives is described in Chapter 4 of the EA.

7. **Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts – which include connected actions regardless of land ownership.** The interdisciplinary team evaluated the possible actions in context of past, present and reasonably foreseeable actions. Significant cumulative effects are not predicted. A complete disclosure of the effects of the project is contained in Chapter 4 of the EA.

8. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.** The project will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or other objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, nor will it cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. A cultural inventory has been completed for the proposed action, and no cultural resources were found.

9. **The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, or the degree to which the action may adversely affect: 1) a proposed to be listed endangered or threatened species or its habitat, or 2) a species on BLM's sensitive species list**. A Fish and Wildlife Clearance report was prepared for this project. The proposed action has been consulted on with the USFWS using the programmatic lynx screen consultation process. Implementation of the proposed action 'may affect is not likely to adversely affect' Canada lynx and lynx habitat. The proposed action increases activity temporarily in the project area. No vegetation will be disturbed to a level that would impact lynx biology. The proposed action is almost exclusively on existing disturbance with the exception of 0.6 acres of new pull site. These sites are approximately 0.3 acres each. No wildlife issues were identified.

10. **Whether the action threatens a violation of a federal, state, local, or tribal law, regulation or policy imposed for the protection of the environment, where non-federal requirements are consistent with federal requirements.** The project does not violate any known federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment. State, local, and tribal interests were given the opportunity to participate in the environmental analysis process. Furthermore, letters were sent to Southern Ute, Ute Mountain and Ute Native American tribes concerning consulting party status, and there was no response from any of the tribes. In addition, the project is consistent with applicable land management plans, policies, and programs.

Connie Clementson 8·1·14

Connie Clementson
Field Manager
Tres Rios Field Office

Date