

U.S. Department of the Interior  
Bureau of Land Management  
White River Field Office  
220 E Market St  
Meeker, CO 81641

## ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

**NUMBER:** DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0030-EA

**CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER:** COC74727

**PROJECT NAME:** WREA Power Line to Sulphur Creek Substation

**LEGAL DESCRIPTION:** Sixth Principal Meridian, Colorado

T. 1 N., R. 94 W.,  
sec. 10, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ , N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ , and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
sec. 15, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
sec. 16, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$  and E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
sec. 21, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ ;  
sec. 22, lots 11 and 13.

**APPLICANT:** White River Electric Association, Inc.

### **DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES:**

***Background/Introduction:*** For reliability of electrical power to White River Electric Association, Inc. (hereafter WREA) members/owners, WREA maintains two sources of transmission voltage power into substations. As such the Sulphur Creek Substation will be interconnected to the transmission system of 69-kV power lines. The Sulphur Creek Substation is an important addition to WREA's electrical system in that it will provide improved reliability for existing customers and additional capacity to serve the growing electrical needs of the White River Valley. The existing 69-kV power that traverses the northern portion of the town of Meeker was constructed in 1955 when the town of Meeker was much smaller and prior to the residential expansion that has occurred in the immediate vicinity of the line. The line is now encumbering buildable lots and impacting visibility on the north side of town. Due to its age, construction, and condition, it needs to be replaced. To rebuild the existing transmission line within the limits of the town would involve gaining access to the right-of-way, getting the needed equipment and materials to the structure locations, and protecting the public and property during construction. The rebuilt transmission power line would still be within the limits of the town of Meeker.

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**Proposed Action:** WREA proposes to construct a new 69-kV overhead power line to feed the Sulphur Creek Substation, which is being constructed on private land along Rio Blanco County Road #11 (Sulphur Creek Road) approximately 0.9 miles north of the Sage Hill Subdivision. WREA plans to remove the transmission power line that runs through the northern end of the town of Meeker after the new power line is constructed. WREA also proposes to replace the existing 12-kV overhead power line authorized in right-of-way (ROW) COC39321. Once the new power line is completed, WREA plans to retire the existing 1.5 miles of three-phase distribution power line along the top of Lobo Mountain, from the antenna sites to the point where the power line terminates to the north. (*See Exhibit A Map*)

**New 69-kV Power Line:** The power line route would begin near the northwest corner of Meeker, close to the mouth of Anderson Gulch, continue westerly up Lobo Mountain, and cross the top of Lobo Mountain in the proximity of the antenna sites. WREA intends to use single steel poles from the northwest corner of Meeker to the bottom of Anderson Gulch. The power poles would be spaced approximately 350-400 feet apart. The power line would be visible climbing the east facing slope, so WREA intends to install a steel H structure with a single long span (approximately 1,000 feet) from the bottom of Anderson Gulch to a second steel H structure at the mid-point on the hillside, reducing the number of visible structures as well as reducing the need for any excavation for access on the lower portion of the hill. Single steel poles would then be placed approximately 350-400 feet apart from the mid-point on the hillside to the antenna sites on the top of Lobo Mountain. By using the existing two-track road from the top of Lobo Mountain down to the east, the upper structures would be set with very little disturbance.

The power line would then follow the existing WREA distribution power line to the north for approximately 1.5 miles before dropping down the slope to the east for approximately 1.2 miles and into the Sulphur Creek Substation. The power line along Lobo Mountain would be constructed on the west side of the slope and off of the sky line. Single wooden poles would be placed approximately 300-325 feet apart from the antenna sites north along the top of Lobo Mountain, then wooden H structures would be placed 700-1000 feet apart down the slope to the east into the Sulphur Creek Substation.

From the north end of Lobo Mountain, WREA intends to descend toward the Sulphur Creek Substation by using long spans (approximately 700-1,000 feet apart) which would result in fewer wooden H structures. Because of the longer span lengths, the structures along the north portion of the line will need to be 2-pole structures (H structures) capable of the strength needed to support the weight of the long spanning conductors.

Setting poles and stringing conductors will require clearing with chainsaws and possibly a hydro-ax. Conductor stringing will be accomplished by hand, the use of 4-wheelers and pickup trucks, and the use of a helicopter. WREA intends to hire a contractor with tracked equipment in order to reduce the need for cutting access trails to structure locations and driving over most of the brush to access the structure locations where the pole holes will be excavated and the poles set.

The total length of the power line would be approximately 3.6 miles, with approximately 3.0 miles located on Federal lands. WREA requests a 75 feet wide right-of-way for the 69-kV power

line. WREA would like to begin construction of the power line in the summer/fall of 2011. Construction will take approximately 10 weeks to complete.

**Replacement of Existing 12-kV Power line:** In addition, WREA's existing 12-kV, three-phase overhead distribution power line, which was constructed in 1962, is in need of replacement. WREA plans to rebuild the distribution line from the bottom of Anderson Gulch up to the top of Lobo Mountain. WREA will remain within the existing 20 feet wide right-of-way but plans to construct the new distribution line just north of the existing line for safety reasons. Because of the long span from the bottom of Anderson Gulch to the mid-point on the hillside, WREA cannot place the distribution line on the transmission line structures. Once WREA reaches the top of Lobo Mountain, the distribution line will be combined with the 69-kV transmission line on the same single poles. Having "under-built distribution" on transmission structures is not a standard practice of WREA, yet for 1.5 miles along the west slope of Lobo Mountain this can be a viable solution considering the terrain and the ability to keep the span lengths at a reasonable distance to facilitate the distribution under-build.

**No Action Alternative:** The power line would not be built, and the existing power line through the town of Meeker would be replaced instead of removed.

**ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD:** None.

**PURPOSE & NEED FOR THE ACTION:** The purpose of the Proposed Action is to manage multiple uses on Public Lands in a manner that avoids, minimizes, reduces, or mitigates potential impacts to other resource values.

The purpose of the action is to allow the development of rights-of-way across BLM surface. The need for the action is established by the BLM's responsibility under the authority of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA) to respond to the request to develop the right-of-way.

**Decision to be Made:** The BLM will decide whether or not to authorize the power line right-of-way, and if so, under what conditions.

**PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:** The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

**Name of Plan:** White River Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan (ROD/RMP).

**Date Approved:** July 1, 1997

**Decision Number/Page:** Page 2-49

Decision Language: “To make public lands available for the siting of public and private facilities through the issuance of applicable land use authorizations, in a manner that provides for reasonable protection of other resource values.”

## **AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES**

**STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH:** In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

## **NATURAL, BIOLOGICAL, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

### **AIR QUALITY**

*Affected Environment:* Based on a review of designated non-attainment areas for criteria pollutants, published by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA 2010), the Proposed Action (PA) is an attainment area for national and state air quality standards. The PA is near Meeker, Colorado and in the White River Basin where industrial facilities include coal mines, soda ash mines, and natural gas processing plants. Due to these industrial uses, increased population, and oil and gas development in this region, emissions of air pollutants in the White River Basin due to exhaust emissions and dust (particulate matter) are likely to increase into the future. Overall air quality conditions in the White River Basin are likely to continue to be in attainment of national ambient air quality (NAAQ) standards due to effective atmospheric dispersion conditions and limited transport of air pollutants from outside the area.

Regional air quality parameters including ozone, nitrogen oxides, and dust are being measured at monitoring sites located at Meeker, Rangely, Dinosaur, and Ripple Creek Pass near the Flat Tops Wilderness Area. The majority of dust pollution in Colorado is from miscellaneous sources (CDPHE 2010), mainly fugitive dust sources. Fugitive dust emissions are often due to earth moving, equipment and vehicles, and windblown disturbances.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Construction of the proposed facilities would result in low and short-term dust generation during construction from vehicles and equipment such as chainsaws, hydro-ax, and construction equipment to dig the holes to set the poles. Non-criteria pollutants (national ambient air quality, NAAQ, standards) have not been set for non-criteria pollutants) such as nitric oxide, air toxics (e.g., benzene), and total suspended particulates (TSP) may also experience slight, temporary increases as a result of the PA. Even with these slight increases in criteria and non-criteria pollutants, the project would be unlikely to result in an exceedance of NAAQ standards and Colorado ambient air quality (CAAQ) standards.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts to air quality would result from the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* None.

## SOILS

*Affected Environment:* The classifications of soils that may be impacted by the project within 30 meters of the proposed power line route are shown in Table 1. There are steep slopes and lands prone to landslides on Federal lands on about half of the route in the Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone complex and Blazon, moist-Rentsac Complex soils. No excavation is proposed to access construction sites, only vegetation disturbance and surface disturbance at the pole placement sites.

**Table 1. Soil Classifications within 30 Meters of the Surface Disturbance Proposed**

Soil Classification	Range Site Description	Potentially Impacted Acres
Jerry-Thornburgh-Rhone Complex, 8-65% slopes	Brushy Loam/Brushy Loam	20
Blazon, moist-Rentsac Complex, 6-65% slopes	Pinyon-Juniper Woodland	54
Abor Clay Loam, 5-30% slopes	Clayey Foothills	2
Patent Loam, 3-8% slopes	Rolling Loam	7

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* When placing power poles, rubber tired vehicles would be used to access the pole locations and place the poles. Vegetation clearing will also be done with a hydro-ax and by hand with chainsaws. A mechanical auger is used to drill a hole, the pole is placed, and the soil is replaced. Ground disturbance is typically limited to the location of the pole. The project proponent has selected a structure design (H-braces) on these steeper sections that will result in larger spans and less overall support poles. Two poles will be placed for the H braces for each structure, but H braces will also result in longer spans of electrical lines. Additional disturbance would occur to access the power pole locations for installation and/or maintenance. These impacts would be more pronounced when soils are saturated. With proper construction practices and reclamation practices, indirect impacts apart from the access routes and the location of the power poles are not expected.

The steepest slopes will be encountered on the route from Anderson Gulch to the top of Lobo Mountain and the section of the route down from the ridge to the Sulphur Creek power station. Through both of these sections, there are soils that are on 50 percent or greater slopes. On the section from Lobo Mountain to the Sulphur Creek power station, there are soils with landslide potential all along the route. The H brace structure design will reduce the number of sites that need access; for example, the section of the line from Anderson Gulch to Lobo Mountain will have two spans and only one support mid-slope because of this design.

Direct impacts from the construction of electrical line would include removal of vegetation, exposure of the soil, and mixing of horizons at the base of the structures. Direct impacts will be limited to access roads and pole placement sites and are expected to be short-term (less than one year). Indirect impacts are not expected due to the small amount of disturbance and the small amount of time needed for installation of power poles.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts to soils would occur.

*Mitigation:* 1. All construction activity shall cease when soils or road surfaces become saturated to a depth of three inches unless there are safety concerns or activities are otherwise approved by the authorized officer.

2. If soil instability is observed during construction or maintenance, such as trenches forming above or below disturbance or movements of more than five cubic yards of soil on the access roads or pole placement sites, the authorized officer will be notified and a plan will be developed, with written approval of the BLM, to improve the stability of the site.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils:* With mitigation this action is unlikely to reduce the productivity of soils on public lands.

## **WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID**

*Affected Environment:* There are no known hazardous or other solid wastes on the subject lands. No hazardous materials are known to have been used, stored, or disposed of at sites included in the project area.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The proposed activities will use regulated materials and could generate some solid and sanitary wastes. The potential for harm to the environment is presented by risks associated with spills of fuel, oil, and/or hazardous substances during construction and maintenance activities. Accidents and mechanical breakdown of machinery are also possible.

*Mitigation:* 1. The right-of-way holder shall comply with all federal, state and/or local laws, rules, and regulations addressing the emission of and/or the handling, use, and release of any substance that poses a risk of harm to human health or the environment.

2. All substances that pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment shall be stored in appropriate containers.

3. Construction sites and all facilities shall be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times; waste materials shall be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. "Waste" means all discarded matter including, but not limited to, human waste, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.

4. As a reasonable and prudent right-of-way holder, acting in good faith, the holder will report all emissions or releases that may pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment, regardless of a substance's status as exempt or nonexempt and regardless of fault, to the Bureau of Land Management's White River Field Office at (970) 878-3800.

5. As a reasonable and prudent right-of-way holder, acting in good faith, the holder will provide for the immediate clean-up and testing of air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils contaminated by the emission or release of any substance that may pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment, regardless of that substance's status as exempt or non-exempt. Where the holder fails, refuses or neglects to provide for the immediate clean-up and testing of air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils contaminated by the emission or release of any quantity of a substance that poses a risk of harm to human health or the environment, the Bureau of Land Management's White River Field Office may take measures to clean-up and test air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils at the lessee/operator's expense. Such action will not relieve the holder of any liability or responsibility.

6. With the acceptance of this authorization, the commencement of development under this authorization, or the running of thirty calendar days from the issuance of this authorization, whichever occurs first, and during the life of the pipeline, the holder, and through the holder, its agents, employees, subcontractors, successors and assigns, stipulates and agrees to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the United States Government, its agencies, and employees from all liability associated with the emission or release of substances that pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment.

**WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND** (includes a finding on Standard 5)

*Affected Environment: Surface Water:* This project is north of the town of Meeker with small localized surface disturbances in ephemeral drainages and ridge tops. Table 2 describes water segments that may be impacted by this project.

**Table 2. Water Quality Classification Table\***

Seg.	Segment Name	Use Protected	Protected Beneficial Uses			
			Aquatic Life	Recreation	Agriculture	Water Supply
7	Mainstem of the White River from Miller Creek to Piceance Creek	No	Cold 1	Primary Contact Recreation from Dec to March and Existing Primary Contact Recreation from April to Nov	Yes	Yes

\* Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Water Quality Control Commission, Regulation No. 37 Classifications and Numeric Standards For Lower Colorado River Basin, effective June 30, 2010

Segment 7 is protected for cold water aquatic life (Cold 1). The cold water designation is protective of aquatic life, including trout, normally found in waters where the summer weekly average temperature does not frequently exceed 20°C. Cold waters typically have high numerical standards and are applied where the physical habitat, water flows, and water quality conditions exist. These segments also have standards that are protective of recreation, agriculture, and water supply.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Accessing the sites, clearing the vegetation around pole placement sites, auguring, and soil disturbance during pole placement

would alter overland flow patterns. Potential direct impacts would include surface soil compaction caused by construction equipment and vehicles. Compaction reduces infiltration and may increase runoff in these small, localized areas. Indirect impacts away from the disturbance and the access roads are not expected if steep slopes and soil with landslide potential remain stable around the access roads and pole placement sites.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No impacts identified.

*Mitigation:* See mitigation described in the *Soils* section.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality:* It is unlikely that construction or maintenance of the electrical lines would result in an exceedence of state water quality standards.

## **WETLANDS AND RIPARIAN ZONES** (includes a finding on Standard 2)

*Affected Environment:* The nearest BLM-administered reach supporting riparian vegetation is Threemile Gulch, which is located approximately three miles from the project area and is up gradient in a different drainage area.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Power line construction would have no conceivable influence on BLM-administered wetlands or riparian habitat.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have any direct or indirect influence on downstream riparian communities.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems:* The Proposed Action would have no conceivable potential for influencing riparian attributes addressed in the standards.

## **VEGETATION** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action occurs through mountain shrub communities (dominated by Gambel oak, serviceberry, snowberry), pinyon-juniper woodlands, and a large pinyon-juniper woodland site that was hydro-axed approximately eight years ago. The hydro-axed site has a dense, healthy, early seral herbaceous plant community with a moderate level of regenerating shrubs (snowberry, serviceberry, and sagebrush). The undisturbed pinyon-juniper and mountain shrub sites have sparser native herbaceous understory vegetation.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The primary impact of the Proposed Action upon vegetation will be from physical destruction of vegetation for the access routes and pole installation sites. If operations occur from May through September, equipment

will create airborne dust which will be deposited on vegetation adjacent to construction activities. Dust deposits will impair plant function and also limit or prevent use of the vegetation by native and domestic herbivores until adequate precipitation occurs to rinse the plants of dust.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* Revegetate all disturbed areas with Native Seed Mix #3 (as written below, no alternates needed). This seed mix and recommended final reclamation practices can be found in the White River Field Office Surface Reclamation Protocol document (available at: <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/wrfo.html>, under Oil and Gas). For this project, if construction is completed during the summer of 2011, seeding should occur in the fall, after September 1.

**Native Seed Mix #3**

Cultivar	Species	Scientific Name	Application Rate (lbs PLS/acre)
Rosanna	Western Wheatgrass	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	4
Whitmar	Bluebunch Wheatgrass	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata ssp. inermis</i>	3.5
Rimrock	Indian Ricegrass	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	3
	Needle and Thread Grass	<i>Hesperostipa comata ssp. comata</i>	2.5
Maple Grove	Lewis Flax	<i>Linum lewisii</i>	1
	Scarlet Globemallow	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0.5

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): Upland plant communities in the project area currently meet the standard and are expected to continue doing so under the Proposed Action.

**INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

*Affected Environment:* Overall, there are few noxious weeds known to occur in the project area. In the main north-south portion of the project area, there is a small infestation of several common burdock plants (*Arctium minus*) located adjacent to the road in the southwest corner of Section 10. There is a scattering of bull thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*) plants near the livestock watering ponds also in the southwest portion of Section 10. There are spotty occurrences of cheatgrass throughout the project area, mostly associated with the roadway or previously disturbed sites near the radio tower site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Construction of the proposed power line will create minimal new earthen disturbance (likely less than one acre) for the access and pole installation sites. Most of the disturbance will occur in healthy native plant communities. The parts of the power line that traverse near the main north-south ridgeline will pass through the weed infestation areas mentioned above. Disturbed areas, if not revegetated with desirable species and/or treated with herbicides to eradicate noxious weeds, may be invaded

by undesirable plant species, reducing the health of the affected plant community. Areas invaded by cheatgrass will have increased potential for fire and further proliferation of cheatgrass. With proper and successful implementation of the proposed mitigation (also see *Vegetation* section), there will be a low likelihood of long term negative impact from this project.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* WREA will be required to monitor this utility corridor for the life of the project and eradicate noxious weeds and control invasive species (such as cheatgrass or other weedy annual species) that occur within or adjacent to the right-of-way using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

#### **THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE PLANT SPECIES** (includes a finding on Standard 4)

*Affected Environment:* There are no plant species listed, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act or plants considered sensitive by the BLM that are known to inhabit areas potentially influenced by the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would have no influence on special status species or associated habitats.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have the potential to influence special status species or associated habitats.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* The proposed and no action alternatives would have no influence on populations or habitats of plants associated with the Endangered Species Act or BLM sensitive species and would have no influence on the status of applicable land health standards.

#### **THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE ANIMAL SPECIES** (includes a finding on Standard 4)

*Affected Environment:* No animals listed, threatened, proposed, or candidate to the Endangered Species Act are known to inhabit or derive important benefit from the project area. Two BLM-sensitive species inhabit the project site: the Brewer's sparrow, a common and widely distributed migratory bird that is associated with the various big sagebrush and mixed shrub communities throughout northwest Colorado, and golden eagle, which has traditionally nested along the cliff faces on the China Wall. The nearest known eagle nest site is about 0.75 mile southwest of the project area, but based on recent nest surveys, the site remained unoccupied during the 2011 nest season.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* That portion of the project nearest an eagle nest (southern end) would ascend an extremely steep mountain shrub slope and parallel an existing power line corridor. At the ridgecrest, the power line would be closely associated with a cluster of existing radio towers. Ground-based and possible helicopter-assisted installation activity would, if this nest were to be occupied during the construction period, remain separated by 0.75 mile and beyond line-of-sight of the nest site. Helicopter flyover and access to the project site should, however, remain cognizant of the nest features associated with this golden eagle territory and confine flights as much as practical to the north of the power line. The existing power line that would be replaced has been in place for over 50 years, and it is unlikely that the installation of an adjacent parallel power line would substantially elevate the risk of a line strike.

The power line corridor would traverse about 0.6 mile of shrubland habitats likely to support Brewer's sparrow. Presuming average nest densities for this area, it is likely that up to 30 pairs of sparrows may nest in close proximity to proposed construction activities from mid-May through mid-July. Considering the limited need for off-road access (about 75 percent of the power line lies within 50 meters of existing access) and that pole installation would represent the most persistent and intense form of activity, it is likely that disturbance capable of disrupting initial nest efforts would be limited to 12-15 pairs of birds. This worst-case loss would be considered minor and localized and would have no measurable influence on the birds' abundance or distribution after the construction year.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have potential to adversely influence the reproductive activity of golden eagle or Brewer's sparrow.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species:* The Land Health Standard is generally met across the project area. Installation of the power line would, in the worst case, have limited influence on migratory birds nesting along the power line corridor. These short term and localized consequences would not adversely affect the viability, abundance, or distribution of Brewer's sparrow at the smallest landscape scale after the year of construction. As conditioned, helicopter activity along the corridor would have no effective influence on potential golden eagle nesting functions, and the power line corridor should pose no increased threat of line-strike. The proposed and no action alternatives would, therefore, not contradict continued meeting of the standard.

## **MIGRATORY BIRDS**

*Affected Environment:* The power line route would traverse three basic habitat types: mixed shrub and sagebrush (~1.4 miles), steeply-sloped and sparse canopy pinyon-juniper woodland (~0.4 mile), and recent mechanically treated shrublands (~1 mile) that are largely herbaceous in character. Several dozen species of migratory birds nest in these habitats at

varying densities, largely from mid-May through mid-July. In the event project construction were to occur within the core breeding season and based on WRFO's experience, it is likely that roughly 10 pairs of common grassland generalists (e.g., vesper sparrow, western meadowlark, lark sparrow) would be subject to disturbance in the treated shrubland type, in addition to a half-dozen more common woodland associates in the pinyon-juniper (e.g., chipping sparrow, rock wren, black-throated gray warbler), and up to three dozen pairs in the shrublands (e.g., dusky flycatcher, blue-gray gnatcatcher, green-tailed and spotted towhees, Virginia's warbler).

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Disturbance attributable to this project would involve temporary and short term disruption of migratory bird nesting activity. It is possible that up to four dozen nesting attempts may be adversely influenced during the 2011 nesting season. The only special status species (USFWS (US Fish and Wildlife Service) Bird of Conservation Concern and BLM sensitive) involved with this project area is the Brewer's sparrow (see *Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Animal Species* section above). These effects are considered worst-case, since those efforts disrupted early in the nesting sequence would have a reasonable chance of successfully re-nesting, and efforts challenged later in the season would be increasingly resistant to nestling mortality due to prolonged absence of the parent birds for brooding or feeding. The proposed project would generally have no effective influence on the character of habitat available for subsequent nesting functions. However, the power poles will offer convenient perch substrate for resident and migratory raptor populations. Normally incorporated as an industry standard, properly designed structure and conductor configurations would pose no electrocution hazard to large perching birds. The overall effects on individual migratory birds (including raptor) along the three mile project corridor are expected to have no measurable influence on the abundance or distribution of any population in the short or long term.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have localized deleterious effects on migratory bird reproductive activity.

*Mitigation:* Both power lines will be designed and constructed to conform to most current raptor protection standards as outlined in *Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 2006* (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee, Edison Electric Institute and the California Energy Commission, 2006).

## **WILDLIFE, AQUATIC** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* There are no aquatic habitats that would be influenced by power line installation.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* None.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None.

*Mitigation:* None.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): There would be no reasonable likelihood of aquatic habitats being influenced by the proposed or no action alternatives and, as such, these alternatives would have no effect on any associated land health standard.

### **WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL** (includes a finding on Standard 3)

*Affected Environment:* Big game, particularly deer, make year-round use of the project area. Although primarily serving as winter range for big game and classified as a winter concentration area (October-May), deer are found regularly throughout the summer, especially on either end of the route near the town of Meeker and on Sulphur Creek.

The route involves little habitat or substrate considered suitable for raptor nesting. Historic cliff-nest sites for red-tailed hawk are located a minimum 0.25 mile from the nearest point of the project; steeply-sloped sparsely-canopied woodlands and Gambel oak motts along the route have low probabilities of occupancy. The route does subtend a prominent cliff face on the northeast corner of Meeker, but construction activity would remain on the valley floor about 200 vertical feet below and about 1/8 mile distant from this substrate.

A number of small mammals are associated with the mixed and mountain shrub communities traversed by this project. These small mammal communities tend to be dominated by a few abundant generalists (e.g., deer mouse, least chipmunk), with other members (e.g., sagebrush vole) widely distributed at lower densities in suitable habitat. None of the species potentially involved display narrow ecological tolerance or are geographically restricted.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Most of the construction activity associated with the project would tend to be localized, transient, and of low intensity. About 60 percent of the project length lies within 100 meters of an existing two-track, and construction activity would be confined to that corridor. The cross country segment to the west would use existing right-of-way access that descends and terminates about halfway down from the top of Lobo Mountain. The remaining segment into Anderson Gulch is extremely steep and offers no opportunities for vehicular use. The cross-country component to the east would likely involve four to five pole locations that would require about three points of access. The westernmost point would likely follow or parallel an existing fenceline corridor. The remaining sites, a spur ridge off Lobo Mountain and a sagebrush-Gambel oak basin, appear unroaded and would likely be accessed from the top of Lobo and private lands in Sulphur Creek, respectively. These off-road segments would likely involve about 0.25 mile of access from the top of Lobo, and as little as 500 feet of access across the sagebrush basin. The entire project area is located within a 2,000-acre block of public land that has no legal public form of vehicular access. Vehicle use is likely infrequent and relegated to adjoining landowners outside the fall big game hunting seasons. Vehicle use during the big game hunting season (primarily mid-October through mid-November) likely involves daily use by multiple vehicles.

Construction activity would occur during the summer—a period of low density occupancy by big game. Although individual animals may be subjected to substantial disturbance through the 10-

week construction period, construction activity would be easily avoided by animals since the activities would be predictably confined to the access road/power line corridor and be of short duration in any given locale. Although highly disruptive, helicopter support work, too, would be brief and confined to the right-of-way corridor.

Although of lesser importance due to the project area's land-locked nature, the ultimate disposition of power pole access trails would normally be an important long-term consideration for big game habitat management. Access construction is expected to involve no more than two short trails on the project's east end, but these trails would access prominent terrain features in previously unroaded areas. Particularly during the fall and winter months, vehicle use of these features would temporarily expand the extent of forage and cover resources avoided by big game.

The actual area where vegetation would be removed (and mineral soil exposed) for power poles and pole access represents a discountable fraction of forage and cover resources used by resident wildlife (probably less than one acre). However, these features also represent a source for the distribution and proliferation of invasive and noxious weeds into previously remote areas—with far-reaching consequences on the availability and quality of forage and cover for big game and non-game wildlife populations. Particularly on the project's east end, blading to mineral soil for off-road access should be used only where imperative for safe travel and be as discontinuous as possible. Bladed access segments would be subject to seedbed preparation and seeding with the BLM-approved seed mix in the fall of 2011.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no action authorized that would have potential to influence terrestrial wildlife that resides in the project area during the summer months.

*Mitigation:* Particularly on the project's east end, blading to mineral soil for off-road access should be used only where imperative for safe travel and be as discontinuous as possible. Bladed access segments would be subject to seedbed preparation and seeding as presented in the *Vegetation* section above.

*Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities* (partial, see also *Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic*): The project area presently meets the land health standards. As proposed and because of site-specific circumstances, installation activities and residual access that may remain on public lands in the long term would have relatively minor adverse consequences and would not contradict continued meeting of the standard.

## **WILD HORSES**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is not located within a designated wild horse management area. A designated wild horse area is located approximately 30 miles to the south and west of the proposed project.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action would have not impacts on the wild horse management area.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* None.

*Mitigation:* None.

## **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed power line right-of-way has been inventoried at the Class III (100% pedestrian) level (Davenport 2011 Compliance Dated 4/21/2011) with no cultural resources identified in the area inventoried for the power line.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The Proposed Action will not impact any known cultural resources. Due to the steep slopes on portions of the line, it is unlikely there are any resources within 308 meters that could potentially be impacted.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no new impacts to cultural resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the holder is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the holder as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the holder will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the holder wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the holder will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the holder will then be allowed to resume construction.

Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you

must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

## PALEONTOLOGY

*Affected Environment:* The proposed power line traverses three geologic formations along its route: the Iles formation, the Williams Fork formation, and the Mancos Shale formation (Tweto 1979).

The Cretaceous Age Williams Fork formation is known to produce a variety of vertebrate, invertebrate, and plant fossils including dinosaurs (Armstrong and Wolny 1989, Carpenter personally communication 2011) multituberculates, marsupial mammals, crocodiles, mollusks, and various conifers (Armstrong and Wolny 1989).

The Cretaceous Age Iles formation is also known to produce vertebrate fossils, though preservation is not as good as other formations, along with gar scales, turtles, ammonites, and plant material (Armstrong and Wolny 1989, Bilbey et. al. 2010).

The Cretaceous Age Mancos Shale formation is known to produce a variety of vertebrate and invertebrate fossils and intertongues with units of overlying Mesa Verde group including the Williams Fork and Iles formations. In some areas it produces mosasaurs and plesiosaurs, ammonites, baculites, clams, oysters, and crayfish burrows along with a variety fish and shark teeth and scales. To date there have been no reports of vertebrates from outcrops on Mancos Shale while baculites have been reported (Baker 1986).

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Except for any possible impacts from drilling holes for the various power poles and towers, the Proposed Action does not involve excavation into the underlying formations which significantly reduces the potential impacts to fossil resources. Any impacts that could potentially result from using an auger to drill holes for the poles would be virtually impossible to identify and analyze. There is a small potential to impact the overall scientific fossil record from the Proposed Action.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no new impacts on fossil resources under the No Action Alternative.

*Mitigation:* The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing paleontological sites or for collecting fossils. If fossil materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the holder is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the holder as to:

- whether the materials appear to be of noteworthy scientific interest
- the mitigation measures the holder will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not feasible).

If the holder wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the holder will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the holder will then be allowed to resume construction.

**ELEMENTS NOT PRESENT OR NOT AFFECTED:**

No flood plains or prime and unique farmlands exist within the area affected by the Proposed Action. There are also no known Native American religious or environmental justice concerns associated with the Proposed Action.

**OTHER ELEMENTS:** For the following elements, only those brought forward for analysis will be addressed further.

Other Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, Not Brought Forward for Analysis	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Visual Resources			X
Fire Management			X
Forest Management			X
Hydrology/Water Rights		X	
Rangeland Management			X
Realty Authorizations			X
Recreation		X	
Access and Transportation			X
Geology and Minerals	X		
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	X		
Wilderness	X		
Wild and Scenic Rivers	X		
Cadastral	X		
Socio-Economics	X		
Law Enforcement	X		

**VISUAL RESOURCES**

*Affected Environment:* Visual resources are the visible physical features of a landscape that convey scenic value. Scenic values in the BLM White River Resource Area have been classified according to the Visual Resource Management (VRM) system, and VRM objectives were established in the 1997 White River ROD/RMP. Visual resource management provides a way to inventory and classify visual resources, describe characteristic landscapes, determine contrasts from proposed actions, and present mitigation for scenic value impacts. The visual

resource objective in the White River ROD/RMP is to manage BLM land to maintain the quality of scenic and visual resources.

The Proposed Action would be located in a BLM-designated VRM Class II area. The objective of Class II lands is to retain the existing character of the landscape and the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be low. Management activities may be seen, but should not attract the attention of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape. Most BLM lands within the viewshed of the town of Meeker fall within the VRM Class II category.

As the project area is immediately adjacent to the town of Meeker, those most affected by any change to the viewshed would be local residents and visitors to the town. Views from town range from the routine to the dramatic. Views to the east and south are typical of the area, encompassing a rural, pastoral setting characterized by active ranches and rolling hillsides. Views to the west and north of China Wall and Lobo Mountain are more dramatic with steep hillsides, cliffs, and sharp ridgelines composed of mixed vegetation including pinyon-juniper and Douglas fir.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Most residents and visitors would see project components from vehicles while traveling on Colorado Highway 13 or from the town of Meeker, near the area of Hill and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. The most visible features of the project are likely to be the steel H-structures as the transmission line goes from Anderson Gulch, westerly up Lobo Mountain. This will be a dominant change to the existing landscape and would represent a major, long-term impact on the visual resources of the area. However, if the steel structures are treated to reduce reflectivity and darkened to blend with the surrounding landscape and backdrop vegetation, the overall impact to visual resources will be reduced.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* No construction of the transmission line would occur under the No Action Alternative, thus resulting in no impacts to visual resources.

*Mitigation:* 1. Steel pole structures will be pre-weathered to reduce reflectivity and darken to a deep rust color to blend with the surrounding landscape and backdrop vegetation.

2. Remove as little vegetation as possible during construction. All disturbed areas shall be re-contoured and re-vegetated to blend with the natural topography as soon as possible after disturbance, where practicable.

## **FIRE MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action is located within both the B9 Meeker East and the C9 Danforth Hills fire management polygons. The vegetation for the B9 Meeker East polygon is primarily privately owned agricultural and rangeland, with isolated/intermingled BLM parcels with fuel types consistent with the C9 Danforth Hills polygon, which is a mix of

mountain shrub, mountain big sagebrush, aspen, and pinyon-juniper woodlands. Resource management objectives within the B9 polygon are to protect private land and structures when threatened by public land fires and manage BLM lands adjoining National Forest lands or Colorado Division of Wildlife lands consistent with fire management goals on those adjoining lands. Within the C9 polygon, resource management objectives are to manage naturally ignited fires of up to 200 acres in size throughout the unit to promote a vegetative mosaic and protect oil and gas facilities in the Wilson Creek Oil Field and major power lines crossing the unit when threatened by public land fires.

Fires in the area of the proposed power line route are historically lightning caused and typically range in size from 0.1 to five acres. Large fire history directly within the project area includes two separate Black Diamond fires, one in 1990 (180 acres) and a second in 2001 (101 acres). Recent large fire occurrence in the C9 polygon includes the Three Mile fire in 2009 (113 acres) and the Buckskin Valley fire in 2010 (9 acres).

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Existing tree cover of pinyon-juniper at locations of poles and conductors will require the operator to clear some of adjacent canopy. If not adequately treated, these trees will result in elevated hazardous fuels conditions and remain on-site for many years. Vegetation removal and soil disturbance could provide an opportunity for noxious weeds and cheatgrass to establish or expand in the area, which would increase fuel loads. These accumulations of dead material are very receptive to fire brands and spotting from wind driven fires and can greatly accelerate the rate of spread of the fire front. If not treated the slash and woody debris will create an elevated hazardous dead fuel loading which could pose significant control problems in the event of a wildfire. Additionally, there would be greater threat to the public and fire suppression personnel.

The National Fire Plan calls for “firefighter and public safety” to be the highest priority for all fire management activities. During construction associated with the proposed project, fire management may have little choice but to suppress all fires within close proximity to the project area. This aggressive fire suppression response will prevent fire from playing a natural role in creating a vegetation mosaic within the affected C9 polygon.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no clearing of the trees and no increase in dead fuel loading susceptible to fire.

*Mitigation:* When working on lands administered by the BLM WRFO, notify Craig Interagency Dispatch (970-826-5037) in the event of any fire.

- The reporting party will inform the dispatch center of fire location, size, status, smoke color, aspect, fuel type, and provide their contact information.
- The reporting party, or a representative of, should remain nearby, in a safe location, in order to make contact with incoming fire resources to expedite actions taken towards an appropriate management response.
- The applicant and contractors will not engage in any fire suppression activities outside the approved project area. Accidental ignitions caused by welding, cutting, grinding, etc. will be suppressed by the applicant only if employee safety

is not endangered and if the fire can be safely contained using hand tools and portable hand pumps. If chemical fire extinguishers are used the applicant must notify incoming fire resources on extinguisher type and the location of use.

- Natural ignitions caused by lightning will be managed by Federal fire personnel. If a natural ignition occurs within the approved project area, the fire may be initially contained by the applicant only if employee safety is not endangered. The use of heavy equipment for fire suppression is prohibited, unless authorized by the Field Office Manager.

See *Forest Management* section for direction on removal of woody material.

## **FOREST MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The Proposed Action would traverse pinyon-juniper stands that are mature and on productive exposures. Productive exposure types occur on primarily lower gradient slopes and north and east aspects. Growth rates are higher in these areas due to soil features which allow for effective use of precipitation. Mature pinyon-juniper trees on productive exposures establish themselves as the dominant plant community on the site.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Due to the nature of the Proposed Action, there is a need to remove trees at power pole locations and a further need to remove trees that may interfere with the power line. The removal of trees by hydro-ax will reduce the accumulation of materials at the pole locations. The removal of trees by chainsaw will primarily be under the power lines, and the material will remain on site unless dispersed. It is unknown how many trees will need to be removed for the pole locations and what may interfere with the power line.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There would be no removal of pinyon-juniper trees.

*Mitigation:* Trees removed by chainsaw will be cut with a stump height no greater than six inches and all limbs will be scattered, be limbed, cut into four foot sections, and limbs scattered. Because it is unknown how many trees will need to be removed for poles and what may interfere with the power line, WREA will contact the BLM WRFO Forester post-construction so that an inspection of the site may take place and an estimate of trees removed may be calculated for billing.

## **RANGELAND MANAGEMENT**

*Affected Environment:* The proposed power line occurs in the Lion Canyon pasture of the Smith/Crawford allotment (06625). The Smith/Crawford allotment is used by David Smith Ranches LLC and Ken and Gayle Rogers for their livestock operations. Table 3 outlines the permitted use in this area. Livestock are permitted to graze in this pasture every year from May 15 through June 30 and again, in a different part of the pasture, from October 1 through October

31. The use periods, use areas, and operator vary on an even/odd year basis, but livestock can be expected to be present in the general project area during the permitted use periods. There is an old, non-functional drift fence traversing generally north-south through the east half of section 10. It currently serves no purpose.

**Table 3**

Permitted Livestock Use Periods in Area of Proposed Action								
Allotment Name	Pasture Name	Use Year	Livestock		Date		% PL	BLM AUMs scheduled
		Even or odd	#	Kind	On	Off		
Smith / Crawford 06625	Lion Canyon	Even (Smith)	40	C	5/15	6/30	90	37
	Lion Canyon	Odd (Smith)	50	C	10/1	10/31	90	56
	Lion Canyon	Even (Rogers)	40	C	10/1	10/31	90	46
	Lion Canyon	Odd (Rogers)	50	C	5/15	6/30	90	70

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Construction of the power line will result in a short term loss of approximately one animal unit month (AUM – the amount of forage necessary to sustain one cow and her calf for a one month period) of livestock forage. During the construction period, if airborne dust coats vegetation adjacent to the power line route, the palatability of that vegetation will be negatively impacted temporarily until adequate precipitation occurs to rinse the vegetation clean (see *Vegetation* section). Prompt and effective revegetation of the power line corridor will result in an overall long term increase in forage production on the affected lands of up to two AUMs especially in the northeastern part of the project area. However, there will be minimal, if any effect, on livestock grazing because livestock generally do not make use of the steep slopes in the east half of Section 10.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* There will be no change from the present situation.

*Mitigation:* None.

## ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

*Affected Environment:* The access into the Proposed Action would be via BLM Road 1602 from State Highway 64 or via Sulphur Creek Road. From BLM Road 1602, access to the project alignment would be on BLM Roads 1602A and 1602B, which both intersect with BLM Road 1603. BLM Road 1603 is an access road running approximately parallel to the project alignment and is used primarily for access to the communication facilities on top of Lobo Mountain. Overall BLM Roads 1602, 1602A, 1602B, and 1603 receive little use from the general public.

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* Only a minor increase in traffic during construction is expected as a result of this project. The proponent will utilize a combination of pick-up trucks, OHVs (off-highway vehicles), tracked equipment, and a helicopter to set the poles and string the line. During setting and construction, no road closures

are anticipated and no increase in public use as a result of this project is anticipated. As such, no major or long-term impacts to access and transportation is expected.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* Under this alternative there would be no impacts to access and transportation.

*Mitigation:* None.

## REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS

*Affected Environment:* The following table describes the existing rights-of-way on the Lobo Mountain communication site and adjacent to the proposed power line.

Holder	ROW Case file	Case type	Location
Qwest Corporation	COC34068	Telephone Cable	Lobo Mtn to Vortac site
BLM WRFO	COC17566	Road	BLM Road 1603B
FAA Northwest Mountain Region	COC0126162	Air Navigational Facility	Vortac
BLM WRFO	COC17565	Communication site	Lobo Mountain
Rio Blanco County	COC19633		
Rio Blanco County	COC48517		
Educational Media Foundation	COC49077		
Public Broadcast of Colorado	COC49093		
Union Telephone Company	COC58255		
Mountain Communication & Electric	COC62264		
James H Sheridan	COC62942		
UBET Wireless	COC65019		
Western Slope Communications	COC71612		
WREA	COC040170		
White River Forest Service	COC074629		

*Environmental Consequences of the Proposed Action:* The portion (1.5 miles) of the existing power line right-of-way (ROW) COC39321 along the top of Lobo Mountain will be amended to reflect the removal of the poles and co-location of the 12-kV power line on the same poles within ROW COC74727. ROW COC74727 will be three miles (15,840 feet) long, 75 feet wide, and contain approximately 27.27 acres. In order to avoid impacts to existing ROWs, WREA will need to coordinate with existing ROW holders prior to construction.

*Environmental Consequences of the No Action Alternative:* The existing power line will remain through privately-owned residential lots in Meeker.

*Mitigation:* 1. The holder shall provide the BLM Authorized Officer with data in a format compatible with the WRFO's ESRI ArcGIS Geographic Information System (GIS) to accurately locate and identify the right-of-way and all constructed infrastructure, within 60 days. Acceptable data formats are: (1) corrected global positioning system (GPS) files with sub-meter accuracy or better; (2) ESRI shapefiles or geodatabases; or at last resort, (3) AutoCAD .dwg or .dxf files. Option 2 is highly preferred. In ALL cases the data must be submitted in UTM Zone 13N, NAD 83, in units of meters. Data may be submitted as: (1) an email attachment; or (2) on a standard compact disk (CD) in compressed (WinZip only) or uncompressed format. All data

shall include metadata, for each submitted layer, that conforms to the Content Standards for Digital Geospatial Metadata from the Federal Geographic Data Committee standards. Questions should be directed to WRFO BLM GIS staff at (970) 878-3800.

2. All activities shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans. This includes acquiring all required state and/or local permits, effectively coordinating with existing facility ROW holders, and implementing all applicable mitigation measures required by each permit.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY:** This action is consistent with the scope of impacts addressed in the White River ROD/RMP. The cumulative impacts of power lines are addressed in the White River ROD/RMP for each resource value that would be affected by the Proposed Action.

#### **REFERENCES CITED:**

Armstrong, Harley J. and David G. Wolny

1989 Paleontological Resources of Northwest Colorado: A Regional Analysis. Museum of Western Colorado, Grand Junction, Colorado.

Baker, Steven G.

1986 initial Archaeological Monitoring and Emergency Mitigation Procedures at Chevron U.S.A.'s Rangely Field CO<sub>2</sub> Injection Project, Rio Blanco County, Colorado, 1985. Centuries Research, Inc., Montrose, Colorado.

Bilbey, Sue Ann, PhD. Evan Hall, Peter Robinson, PhD, and Quinn Hall

2010 final Paleontological Evaluation for the Rockies Express/Rex Pipeline Project 2004-2006, Rio Blanco and Moffat Counties, Northwestern Colorado. Uinta Paleontological Consultants, Inc., Vernal, Utah. #10-115-09

CDPHE. Air Pollution Control Division (APCD)

2010 Colorado 5 Year Monitoring Network Assessment. Available online at: <http://www.colorado.gov/airquality/>. Accessed May 13, 2011.

Davenport, Barbara

2011 Class III Cultural Resources inventory for the Proposed 69-kV Power line \_ Town of Meeker to South Lobo & North Lobo to Sulphur Creek (3.5 miles) in Rio Blanco County, Colorado for White River Electric Association. Grand River Institute, Grand Junction, Colorado. #11-11-11

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

2010 Currently Designated Non-Attainment Areas for all Criteria Pollutants.

Tweto, Ogden

1979 Geologic Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of the Interior, Reston, Virginia.

**PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:** A public meeting was held at Kilowatt Korner in Meeker, Colorado on January 12, 2010. Publication of the meeting notice was printed in The Herald Times and the Glenwood Post. The WRFO received three comments supporting the new power line construction from town of Meeker citizens whose property is currently affected by the existing power line through the town of Meeker. Consultation with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Office was completed.

**INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:** The Proposed Action was presented to, and reviewed by the White River Field Office interdisciplinary team on November 22, 2010.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Area of Responsibility</b>	<b>Date Signed</b>
Bob Lange	Hydrologist	Air Quality, Water Quality (Surface and Ground), Hydrology and Water Rights, and Soils	05/27/2011
Mary Taylor	Botanist	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Threatened and Endangered Plant Species	04/06/2011
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Paleontological Resources	4/21/2011
Mary Taylor	Rangeland Management Specialist	Wetlands and Riparian Zones, Invasive, Non-Native Species, Vegetation , Rangeland Management	04/06/2011
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Migratory Birds, Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Animal Species, Terrestrial and Aquatic Wildlife	04/07/2011
Christina Barlow	Natural Resource Specialist/HazMat Coordinator	Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	01/27/2011
Chad Schneckenburger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Wilderness, Access and Transportation, Recreation,	04/12/2011
Garner Harris	Zone Fire Management Officer	Fire Management	05/11/2011
Jim Michels	Forester /Fire / Fuels Technician	Forest Management	04/19/2011
Paul Daggett	Mining Engineer	Geology and Minerals	01/14/2011
Stacey Burke	Realty Specialist	Realty Authorizations	05/06/2011
Chad Schneckenburger	Natural Resource Specialist / Outdoor Recreation Planner	Visual Resources	04/12/2011
Melissa J. Kindall	Range Technician	Wild Horses	5/11/2011

# **Finding of No Significant Impact/Decision Record (FONSI/DR)**

## **DOI-BLM-CO-110-2011-0030-EA**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT (FONSI)/RATIONALE:** The environmental assessment and analysis of the environmental effects of the Proposed Action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures (listed below) result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.

**DECISION/RATIONALE:** It is my decision to authorize a right-of-way for the proposed power line and replacement of the existing power line as described in the attached EA in order to meet the electrical needs of the public in a manner that avoids, minimizes, reduces, or mitigates potential impacts to other resource values. This decision is contingent on meeting all mitigation measures and monitoring requirements listed below:

**MITIGATION MEASURES:**

1. All construction activity shall cease when soils or road surfaces become saturated to a depth of three inches unless there are safety concerns or activities are otherwise approved by the authorized officer.
  
2. If soil instability is observed during construction or maintenance, such as trenches forming above or below disturbance or movements of more than five cubic yards of soil on the access roads or pole placement sites, the authorized officer will be notified and a plan will be developed, with written approval of the BLM, to improve the stability of the site.
  
3. The right-of-way holder shall comply with all federal, state and/or local laws, rules, and regulations addressing the emission of and/or the handling, use, and release of any substance that poses a risk of harm to human health or the environment.
  
4. All substances that pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment shall be stored in appropriate containers.
  
5. Construction sites and all facilities shall be maintained in a sanitary condition at all times; waste materials shall be disposed of promptly at an appropriate waste disposal site. "Waste" means all discarded matter including, but not limited to, human waste, trash, garbage, refuse, oil drums, petroleum products, ashes, and equipment.
  
6. As a reasonable and prudent right-of-way holder, acting in good faith, the holder will report all emissions or releases that may pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment,

regardless of a substance’s status as exempt or nonexempt and regardless of fault, to the Bureau of Land Management’s White River Field Office at (970) 878-3800.

7. As a reasonable and prudent right-of-way holder, acting in good faith, the holder will provide for the immediate clean-up and testing of air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils contaminated by the emission or release of any substance that may pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment, regardless of that substance’s status as exempt or non-exempt. Where the holder fails, refuses or neglects to provide for the immediate clean-up and testing of air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils contaminated by the emission or release of any quantity of a substance that poses a risk of harm to human health or the environment, the Bureau of Land Management’s White River Field Office may take measures to clean-up and test air, water (surface and/or ground) and soils at the lessee/operator’s expense. Such action will not relieve the holder of any liability or responsibility.

8. With the acceptance of this authorization, the commencement of development under this authorization, or the running of thirty calendar days from the issuance of this authorization, whichever occurs first, and during the life of the pipeline, the holder, and through the holder, its agents, employees, subcontractors, successors and assigns, stipulates and agrees to indemnify, defend and hold harmless the United States Government, its agencies, and employees from all liability associated with the emission or release of substances that pose a risk of harm to human health or the environment.

9. Revegetate all disturbed areas with Native Seed Mix #3 (as written below, no alternates needed). This seed mix and recommended final reclamation practices can be found in the White River Field Office Surface Reclamation Protocol document (available at: <http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/fo/wrfo.html>, under Oil and Gas). For this project, if construction is completed during the summer of 2011, seeding should occur in the fall, after September 1. Seed mix number three is outlined below.

**Native Seed Mix #3**

Cultivar	Species	Scientific Name	Application Rate (lbs PLS/acre)
Rosanna	Western Wheatgrass	<i>Pascopyrum smithii</i>	4
Whitmar	Bluebunch Wheatgrass	<i>Pseudoroegneria spicata</i> <i>ssp. inermis</i>	3.5
Rimrock	Indian Ricegrass	<i>Achnatherum hymenoides</i>	3
	Needle and Thread Grass	<i>Hesperostipa comata</i> <i>ssp. comata</i>	2.5
Maple Grove	Lewis Flax	<i>Linum lewisii</i>	1
	Scarlet Globemallow	<i>Sphaeralcea coccinea</i>	0.5

10. WREA will be required to monitor this utility corridor for the life of the project and eradicate noxious weeds and control invasive species (such as cheatgrass or other weedy annual species) that occur within or adjacent to the right-of-way using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

11. WREA will be required to monitor this utility corridor for the life of the project and eradicate noxious weeds and control invasive species (such as cheatgrass or other weedy annual species)

that occur within or adjacent to the right-of-way using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

12. Both power lines will be designed and constructed to conform to most current raptor protection standards as outlined in *Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 2006* (Avian Power Line Interaction Committee, Edison Electric Institute and the California Energy Commission, 2006).

13. Particularly on the project's east end, blading to mineral soil for off-road access should be used only where imperative for safe travel and be as discontinuous as possible. Bladed access segments would be subject to seedbed preparation and seeding.

14. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing historic or archaeological sites, or for collecting artifacts. If historic or archaeological materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the holder is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the holder as to:

- whether the materials appear eligible for the National Register of Historic Places
- the mitigation measures the holder will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not necessary)
- a timeframe for the AO to complete an expedited review under 36 CFR 800-11 to confirm, through the State Historic Preservation Officer, that the findings of the AO are correct and that mitigation is appropriate.

If the holder wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the holder will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the holder will then be allowed to resume construction.

15. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g) the holder of this authorization must notify the AO, by telephone, with written confirmation, immediately upon the discovery of human remains, funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony. Further, pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(c) and (d), you must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the authorized officer.

16. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing paleontological sites or for collecting fossils. If fossil materials are uncovered during any project or construction activities, the holder is to immediately stop activities in the immediate area of the find that might further disturb such materials, and immediately contact the authorized officer (AO). Within five working days the AO will inform the holder as to:

- whether the materials appear to be of noteworthy scientific interest
- the mitigation measures the holder will likely have to undertake before the site can be used (assuming in situ preservation is not feasible).

If the holder wishes, at any time, to relocate activities to avoid the expense of mitigation and/or the delays associated with this process, the AO will assume responsibility for whatever recordation and stabilization of the exposed materials may be required. Otherwise, the holder will be responsible for mitigation cost. The AO will provide technical and procedural guidelines for the conduct of mitigation. Upon verification from the AO that the required mitigation has been completed, the holder will then be allowed to resume construction.

17. Steel pole structures will be pre-weathered to reduce reflectivity and darken to a deep rust color to blend with the surrounding landscape and backdrop vegetation.

18. Remove as little vegetation as possible during construction. All disturbed areas shall be re-contoured and re-vegetated to blend with the natural topography as soon as possible after disturbance, where practicable.

19. When working on lands administered by the BLM WRFO, notify Craig Interagency Dispatch (970-826-5037) in the event of any fire.

- The reporting party will inform the dispatch center of fire location, size, status, smoke color, aspect, fuel type, and provide their contact information.
- The reporting party, or a representative of, should remain nearby, in a safe location, in order to make contact with incoming fire resources to expedite actions taken towards an appropriate management response.
- The applicant and contractors will not engage in any fire suppression activities outside the approved project area. Accidental ignitions caused by welding, cutting, grinding, etc. will be suppressed by the applicant only if employee safety is not endangered and if the fire can be safely contained using hand tools and portable hand pumps. If chemical fire extinguishers are used the applicant must notify incoming fire resources on extinguisher type and the location of use.
- Natural ignitions caused by lightning will be managed by Federal fire personnel. If a natural ignition occurs within the approved project area, the fire may be initially contained by the applicant only if employee safety is not endangered. The use of heavy equipment for fire suppression is prohibited, unless authorized by the Field Office Manager.

20. Trees removed by chainsaw will be cut with a stump height no greater than six inches and all limbs will be scattered, be limbed, cut into four foot sections, and limbs scattered. Because it is unknown how many trees will need to be removed for poles and what may interfere with the power line, WREA will contact the BLM WRFO Forester post construction so that an inspection of the site may take place and an estimate of trees removed may be calculated for billing.

21. The holder shall provide the BLM Authorized Officer with data in a format compatible with the WRFO's ESRI ArcGIS Geographic Information System (GIS) to accurately locate and identify the right-of-way and all constructed infrastructure, within 60 days. Acceptable data formats are: (1) corrected global positioning system (GPS) files with sub-meter accuracy or better; (2) ESRI shapefiles or geodatabases; or at last resort, (3) AutoCAD .dwg or .dxf files. Option 2 is highly preferred. In ALL cases the data must be submitted in UTM Zone 13N, NAD 83, in units of meters. Data may be submitted as: (1) an email attachment; or (2) on a standard compact disk (CD) in compressed (WinZip only) or uncompressed format. All data shall include metadata, for each submitted layer, that conforms to the Content Standards for Digital Geospatial Metadata from the Federal Geographic Data Committee standards. Questions should be directed to WRFO BLM GIS staff at (970) 878-3800.

22. All activities shall comply with all applicable local, state, and federal laws, statutes, regulations, standards, and implementation plans. This includes acquiring all required state and/or local permits, effectively coordinating with existing facility ROW holders, and implementing all applicable mitigation measures required by each permit.

**COMPLIANCE/MONITORING:** On-going compliance inspections and monitoring will be conducted by White River Field Office staff during the construction, operation, maintenance, and reclamation of the project.

**NAME OF PREPARER:** Stacey Burke

**NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:** Heather Sauls

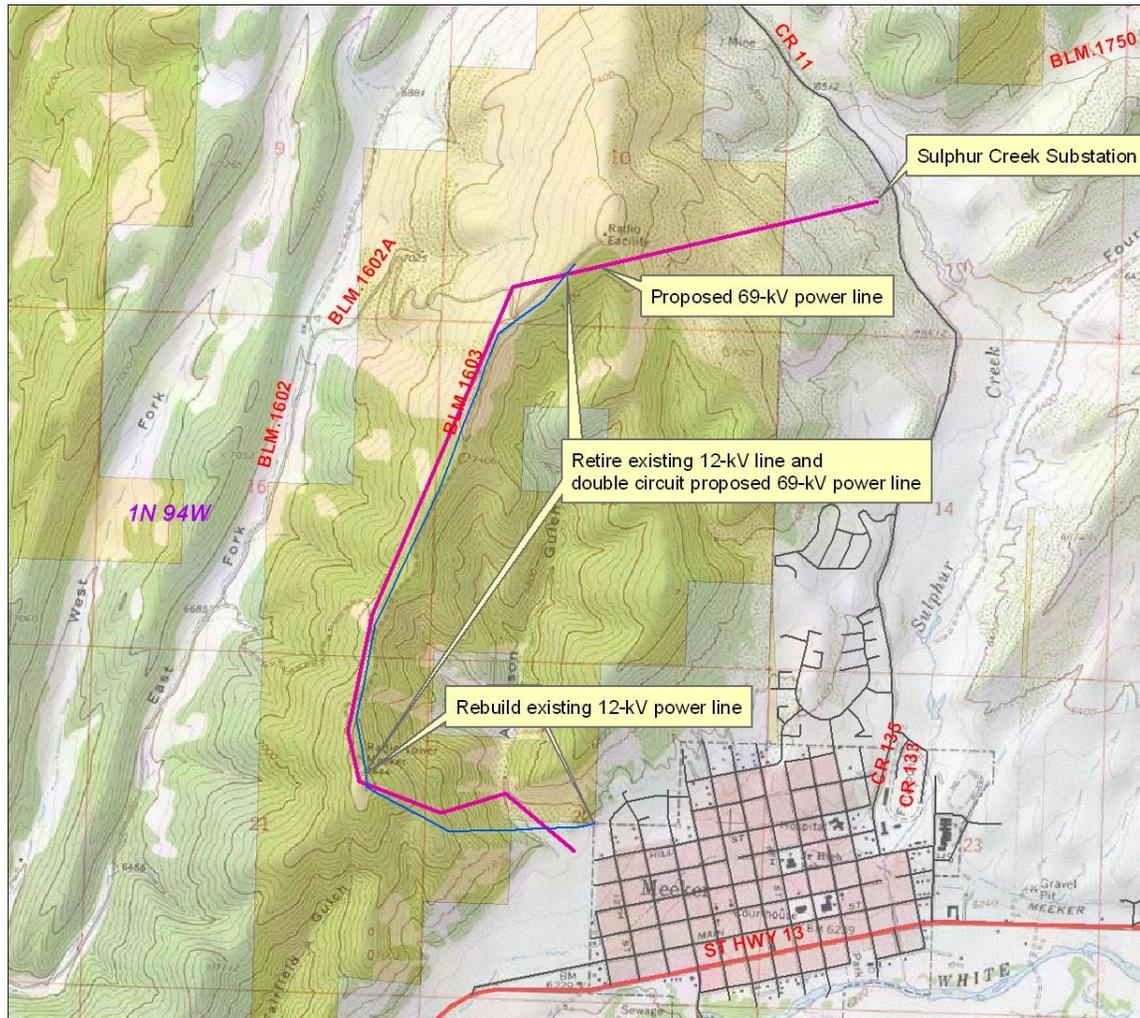
**SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:** Est. M. G. G.  
Field Manager

**DATE SIGNED:** 7/12/11

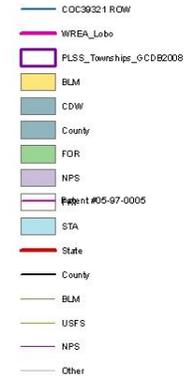
**ATTACHMENTS:**

Exhibit A: Map of WREA 69-kV Overhead Power Line to Sulphur Creek Substation

# WREA 69-kV Overhead Power line to Sulphur Creek Substation T. 1 N., R. 94 W.



## EXHIBIT A



Sources:  
BLM, USGS, CDOW, etc.

Disclaimer:  
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