

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

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION

NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-110-2012-0079-CX

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: COC49086 (Power Line ROW)
COC75498 (Short-term ROW)

PROJECT NAME: Meeker-Rangely Power Line Structure Replacements

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Sixth Principal Meridian, Colorado

T. 1 N., R. 96 W.,
sec. 9, lot 23;
sec. 26, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$.

T. 1 N., R. 97 W.,
sec. 1, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$.

T. 2 N., R. 97 W.,
sec. 34, lots 21 and 23.

T. 2 N., R. 98 W.,
sec. 6, lot 12;
sec. 10, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, and N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;
sec. 11, lot 19, W $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;
sec. 13, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$;
sec. 14, N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$.

T. 2 N., R. 99 W.,
sec. 1, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, and NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$.

APPLICANT: Tri-State Generation & Transmission

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION: Bureau of Land Management (BLM) right-of-way (ROW) COC49086 expired in April 2011. Tri-State has applied for renewal of the ROW. Cultural and biological surveys and data have been collected as part of the renewal process and will be used to document environmental compliance for this request. Tri-State conducted wood pole tests on the transmission line, and the results indicated that these nine structures need to be replaced to maintain the structural integrity of the line. This transmission line is listed as Critical

Infrastructure under North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) guidelines since it is a vital component to the regional electric grid.

Tri-State is requesting a short-term ROW to replace nine (9) structures on the existing Meeker to Rangely 138-kV transmission power line. The structures involved are numbered 170, 195, 200, 208, 210, 252, 276, 298, and 332 (see Exhibit A).

The proposed project includes replacing the existing structures with new taller and wider structures that meet current Tri-State electrical design standards for 138-kV transmission lines. The new replacement structures would be 5 ft taller and set slightly wider (15 ft between poles). They would average about 70-75 ft in height. The new wood pole H-frame structures (similar to the existing structures) would be placed within 5-7 ft (up or down line – not alongside) of the existing structures on the right-of-way. The existing poles would be cut off at ground level to minimize soil disturbance. All activity would be confined to the existing 100-ft right-of-way and 30-ft roads. The exception is around each structure where a larger area is required to safely position manpower and equipment. An area with a radius of 150 ft would be needed.

Existing trails and roads would be used to access the structures for construction. No new access roads are proposed. Access to all structures would require some grading/improvements to existing roads and trails to transport poles, bucket trucks, and other equipment needed to dig holes and raise the structures. All improvements would take place within the existing footprint of the present road.

The structure replacement work would involve a crew of 10 people working during the scheduled outage period from July 16 to July 30, 2012. Pickup trucks, bucket trucks, and digger/derrick trucks are required to improve the road, transport the workers to job site, dismantle the existing structures, erect new ones, and haul off the old structure materials.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with (43 CFR 1610.5-3, BLM 1601.08) the following plan:

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.”

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW: The Proposed Action qualifies as a categorical exclusion under 516 DM 11.9, E19: “*Issuance of short-term (3 years or less) rights-of-way or*

land use authorizations for such uses as storage sites, apiary sites, and construction sites where the proposal includes rehabilitation to restore the land to its natural or original condition.”

The Proposed Action has been reviewed with the list of extraordinary circumstances (43 CFR 46.215) described in the table below.

Extraordinary Circumstance	YES	NO
a) Have significant adverse effects on public health and safety.		X
b) Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands; floodplains; national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.		X
c) Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources.		X
d) Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.		X
e) Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.		X
f) Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.		X
g) Have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, in the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau of office.		X
h) Have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have adverse effects on designated Critical Habitat for these species.		X
i) Violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.		X
j) Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations		X
k) Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites.		X
l) Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species.		X

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

The Proposed Action was presented to, and reviewed by, the White River Field Office interdisciplinary team on 4/10/2012. A complete list of resource specialists who participated in this review is available upon request from the White River Field Office. The table below lists resource specialists who provided additional remarks concerning cultural resources and special status species.

Name	Title	Resource	Date
Michael Selle	Archaeologist	Paleontological Resources	6/6/2012
Kristin Bowen	Archaeologist	Cultural Resources, Native American Religious Concerns	6/15/2012
Laura Dixon	Wildlife Biologist	Special Status Wildlife Species	6/7/2012
Ed Hollowed	Wildlife Biologist	Special Status Wildlife Species	7/5/2012
Amber Shanklin	Biological Technician - Plants	Special Status Plant Species	6/14/2012

REMARKS:

Cultural Resources: There are no cultural-related issues or concerns associated with the Proposed Action. The entire proposed project area was surveyed at the Class III, 100 percent pedestrian level in 2011 (Gibson, Marmor, and Thompson, 2012), as it had not been surveyed prior to the construction of the transmission line. During the 2011 survey, no cultural resources potentially eligible to the National Register of Historic Places were located within the current project's area of potential effect.

Native American Religious Concerns: No Native American religious concerns are known in the project area. Should future consultations with tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, additional measures may be taken.

Paleontological resources: Structures 170, 195, 208 and 210 are located in an area generally mapped as the Douglas Creek Formation (Tweto, 1979) which the BLM WRFO has classified as a Potential Fossil Yield Classification (PFYC) 3, meaning it is known to produce scientifically noteworthy fossil resources (c.f., Armstrong and Wolny. 1989).

Structures 253 and 298 are located in an area generally mapped as the Lower Green River-Wasatch area (Tweto, 1979). The BLM WRFO has classified the Wasatch formation as a PFYC 5 formation, meaning it is known to produce scientifically noteworthy fossil resources (c.f., Armstrong and Wolny. 1989).

Any excavations into the underlying sedimentary rock of either the Douglas Creek or Lower Green River-Wasatch formations have the potential to impact scientifically noteworthy fossil resources. Auger drilling of post holes for the structures makes monitoring, identification, and evaluation of fossil resources virtually impossible. Other ground disturbing activities that extend

into the sedimentary rock, including road maintenance or pad leveling, for construction equipment can be monitored for impacts. Exposed rock outcrops should be examined prior to any construction and monitored during all construction activity at the location.

Special Status Wildlife Species: Construction activities are to begin July 16, which is at the end of core migratory bird nesting season. Construction is also slated to take place along pre-existing roads and in previously disturbed habitat. Disruption to or loss of migratory birds, including Brewer's sparrow, will be negligible.

Raptor nest surveys were conducted in June 2012 by a third party contractor using protocols established by the WRFO wildlife staff. No nesting activity was encountered during these surveys. One accipiter nest in poor repair with no evidence of recent use was recorded about 400 ft from the nearest pole replacement site. An active bald eagle nest (historic site) is located on the opposite side of Highway 64 and 0.5 mile from the nearest project work. Proposed project-related work would not involve raptor nest activity and no restrictions are considered necessary.

Special Status Plant Species: There are no special status plant species issues or concerns associated with 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.
- Gibson, Bonnie, Jason Marmor, and Kevin Thompson
2012 Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc., Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line, Class III Cultural Resources Inventory, Rio Blanco County, Colorado. PaleoWest Archaeology, Denver, Colorado.
- Tweto, Ogden
1979 Geologic Map of Colorado. United States Geologic Survey, Department of the Interior, Reston, Virginia.

MITIGATION:

1. All applicable terms and conditions contained in right-of-way COC49086 shall be carried forward and remain in full force and effect.
2. The holder shall conduct all activities within the authorized limits of the right-of-way.
3. Any proposal involving additional surface disturbance outside of the authorized right-of-way requires an application to the BLM for analysis and authorization. New stipulations for

construction would be applied to projects subject to the regulations and policies existing at the time of authorization.

4. The holder shall monitor all disturbed and reclaimed areas through final abandonment for the presence of invasive, non-native, and/or noxious plant species. The applicant will be responsible for eradication of noxious weeds that occur on site using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.

5. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts.

6. If any archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, activity in the vicinity of the discovery will cease, and the BLM WRFO Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The applicant will make every effort to protect the site from further impacts including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage until BLM determines a treatment approach, and the treatment is completed. Unless previously determined in treatment plans or agreements, BLM will evaluate the cultural resources and, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), select the appropriate mitigation option within 48 hours of the discovery. The holder, under guidance of the BLM, will implement the mitigation in a timely manner. The process will be fully documented in reports, site forms, maps, drawings, and photographs. The BLM will forward documentation to the SHPO for review and concurrence.

7. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the holder must notify the AO, by telephone and 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), the holder must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

8. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25 lbs./day, up to 250 lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands.

9. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the holder or any of his agents must stop work immediately at that site, immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions

for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

10. Any excavations into the underlying native sedimentary stone, except auger holes, must be monitored by a permitted paleontologist. The monitoring paleontologist must be present before the start of excavations that may impact bedrock.

COMPLIANCE PLAN: On-going compliance inspections and monitoring will be conducted by the BLM White River Field Office staff during and after construction. Specific mitigation developed in this document will be followed. The holder will be notified of compliance related issues, and depending on the nature of the issue(s), will be provided 30 days to resolve such issues.

NAME OF PREPARER: Stacey Burke

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: Heather Sauls

COMPLIANCE WITH NEPA

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, E16. This categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

07/06/2012

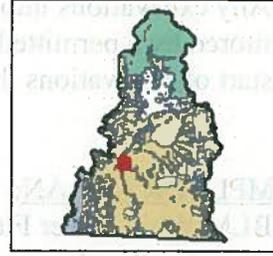
ATTACHMENTS: Exhibit A: Maps of Proposed Action

Tri-State Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line Structure Replacement

Exhibit A

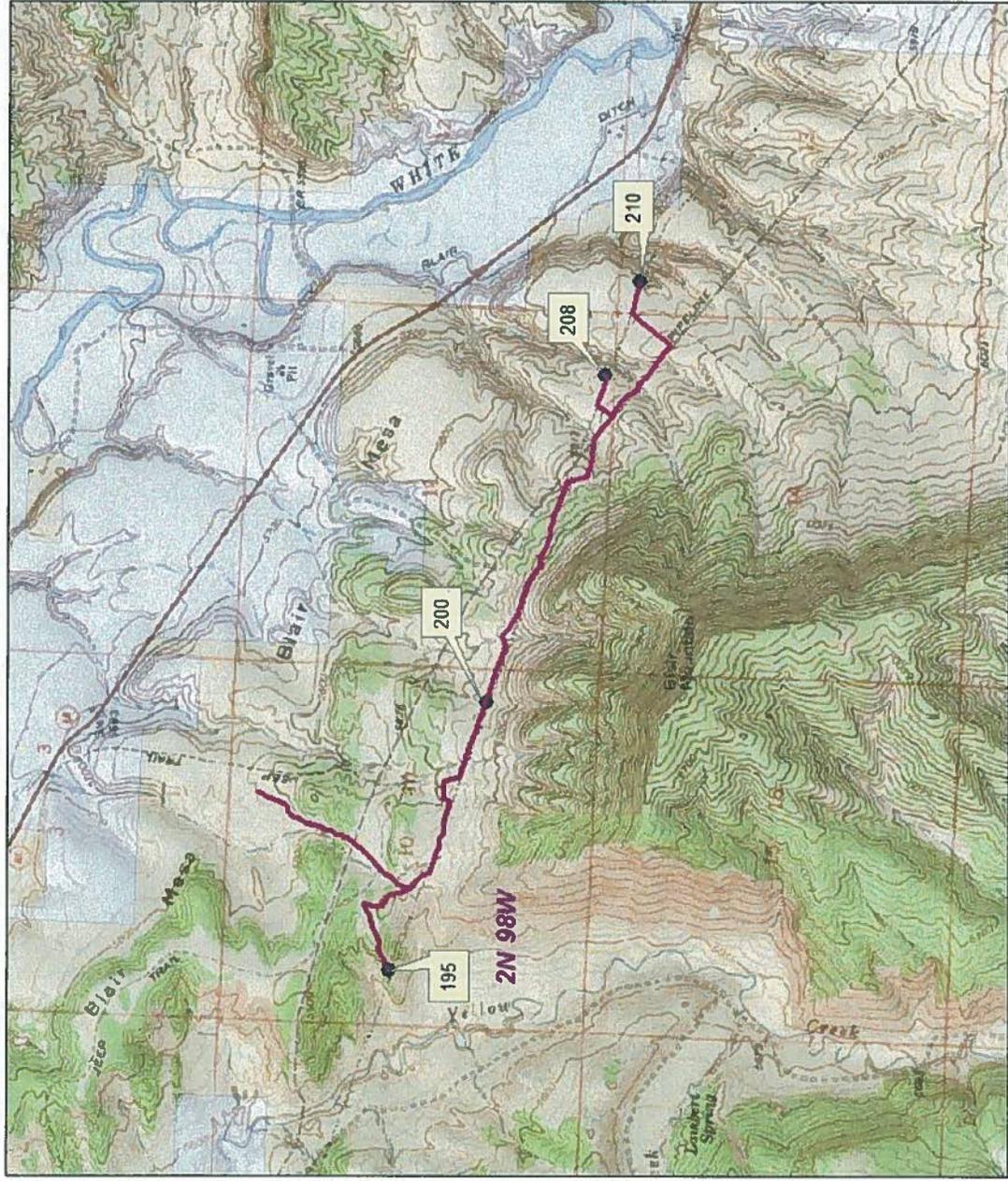


June 2012



Tri-State Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line Structure Replacement

Exhibit A



- Access Road
- Proposed Structure Locations
- ALB_Territory_CO201208



Sources:
BLM, USGS, etc.

Disclaimer:
Although the data of this map is derived from the best available information, the BLM does not warrant the accuracy or completeness of the data. The use of the map for the site is your responsibility. The BLM does not assume any liability for any such warranty.

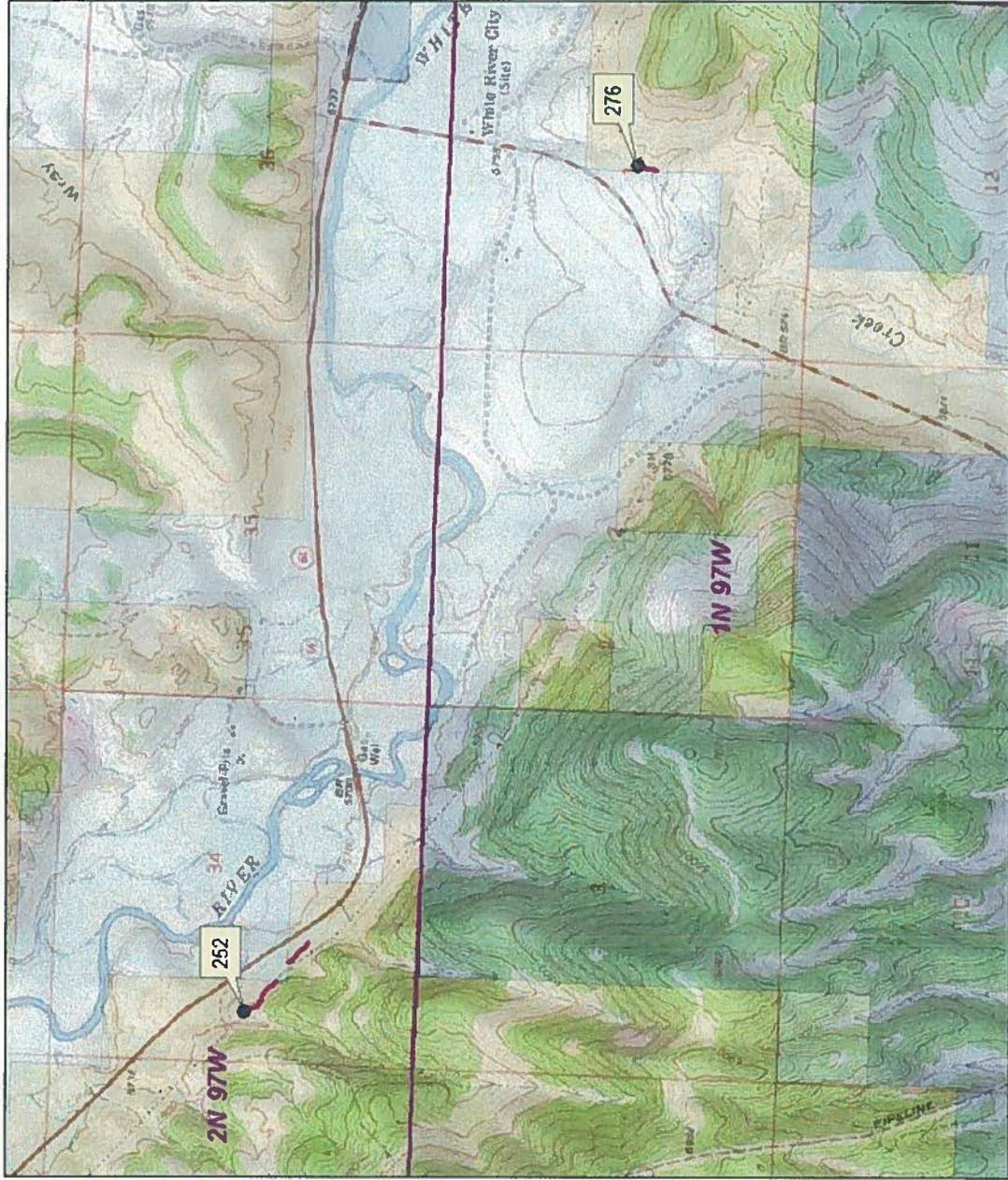


June 2012



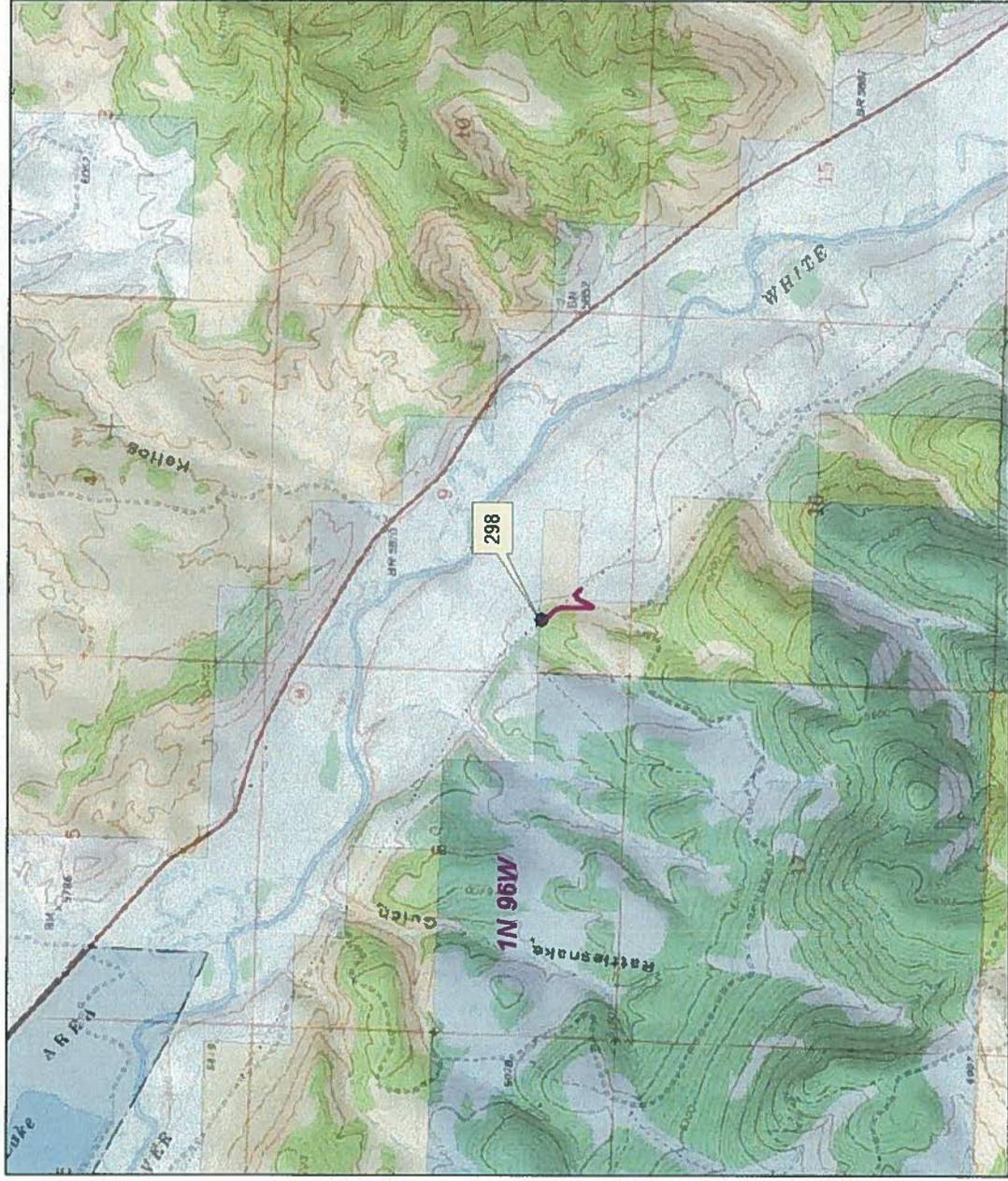
Tri-State Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line Structure Replacement

Exhibit A



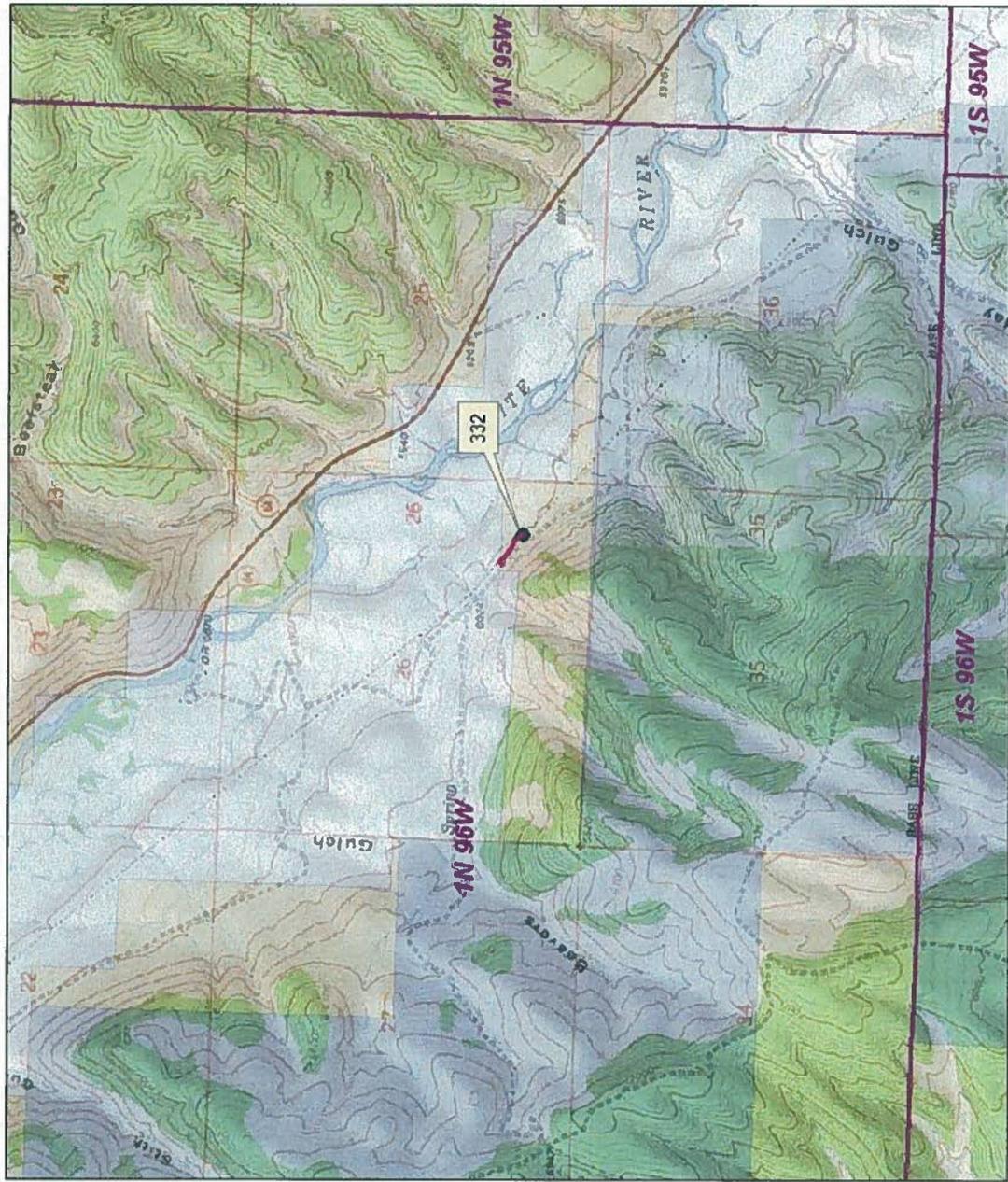
Tri-State Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line Structure Replacement

Exhibit A



Tri-State Meeker-Rangely Transmission Line Structure Replacement

Exhibit A



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

DECISION RECORD

PROJECT NAME: Meeker-Rangely Power Line Structure Replacements

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION NUMBER: DOI-BLM-CO-2012-0079-CX

DECISION

It is my decision to implement the Proposed Action, as mitigated in DOI-BLM-CO-2012-0079-CX, authorizing replacement of power line structures and improvements to associated access roads on the existing Meeker-Rangely 138-kV transmission line.

Mitigation Measures

1. All applicable terms and conditions contained in right-of-way COC49086 shall be carried forward and remain in full force and effect.
2. The holder shall conduct all activities within the authorized limits of the right-of-way.
3. Any proposal involving additional surface disturbance outside of the authorized right-of-way requires an application to the BLM for analysis and authorization. New stipulations for construction would be applied to projects subject to the regulations and policies existing at the time of authorization.
4. The holder shall monitor all disturbed and reclaimed areas through final abandonment for the presence of invasive, non-native, and/or noxious plant species. The applicant will be responsible for eradication of noxious weeds that occur on site using materials and methods approved in advance by the Authorized Officer.
5. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project that they will be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing archaeological sites or for collecting artifacts.
6. If any archaeological materials are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, activity in the vicinity of the discovery will cease, and the BLM WRFO Archaeologist will be notified immediately. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The applicant will make every effort to protect the site from further impacts including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage until BLM determines a treatment approach, and the treatment is completed. Unless previously determined in treatment plans or agreements, BLM will evaluate the cultural resources and, in consultation with the State Historic

Preservation Office (SHPO), select the appropriate mitigation option within 48 hours of the discovery. The holder, under guidance of the BLM, will implement the mitigation in a timely manner. The process will be fully documented in reports, site forms, maps, drawings, and photographs. The BLM will forward documentation to the SHPO for review and concurrence.

7. Pursuant to 43 CFR 10.4(g), the holder must notify the AO, by telephone and 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), the holder must stop activities in the vicinity of the discovery and protect it for 30 days or until notified to proceed by the AO.

8. The holder is responsible for informing all persons who are associated with the project operations that they will be subject to prosecution for disturbing or collecting vertebrate fossils, collecting large amounts of petrified wood (over 25 lbs./day, up to 250 lbs./year), or collecting fossils for commercial purposes on public lands.

9. If any paleontological resources are discovered as a result of operations under this authorization, the holder or any of his agents must stop work immediately at that site, immediately contact the BLM Paleontology Coordinator, and make every effort to protect the site from further impacts, including looting, erosion, or other human or natural damage. Work may not resume at that location until approved by the AO. The BLM or designated paleontologist will evaluate the discovery and take action to protect or remove the resource within 10 working days. Within 10 days, the operator will be allowed to continue construction through the site, or will be given the choice of either (a) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for stabilizing the fossil resource in place and avoiding further disturbance to the fossil resource, or (b) following the Paleontology Coordinator's instructions for mitigating impacts to the fossil resource prior to continuing construction through the project area.

10. Any excavations into the underlying native sedimentary stone, except auger holes, must be monitored by a permitted paleontologist. The monitoring paleontologist must be present before the start of excavations that may impact bedrock.

COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS & CONFORMANCE WITH THE LAND USE PLAN

This decision is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the National Historic Preservation Act. It is also in conformance with the 1997 White River Record of Decision/Approved Resource Management Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The BLM informed the public about this project by listing it on the online WRFO NEPA Register on 4/25/2012 and a copy of the completed Categorical Exclusion will be posted on the WRFO website.

RATIONALE

The Proposed Action is categorically excluded from further documentation under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in accordance with 516 DM 11.9, E16. This categorical

exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects that may significantly affect the environment. The Proposed Action has been reviewed, and none of the extraordinary circumstances described in 43 CFR 46.215 apply. Replacing these nine structures would maintain the structural integrity of a transmission line identified as a vital component of the regional electric grid.

ADMINISTRATIVE REMEDIES

This decision shall take effect immediately upon the date it is signed by the Authorized Officer and shall remain in effect while any appeal is pending unless the Interior Board of Land Appeals issues a stay (43 CFR 2801.10(b)). Any appeal of this decision must follow the procedures set forth in 43 CFR Part 4. Within 30 days of the decision, a Notice of Appeal must be filed in the office of the Authorized Officer at White River Field Office, 220 East Market St., Meeker, CO 81641 with copies sent to the Regional Solicitor, Rocky Mountain Region, 755 Parfet St., Suite 151, Lakewood, CO 80215, and to the Department of the Interior, Board of Land Appeals, 801 North Quincy St., MS300-QC, Arlington, VA, 22203. If a statement of reasons for the appeal is not included with the notice, it must be filed with the Interior Board of Land Appeals at the above address within 30 days after the Notice of Appeal is filed with the Authorized Officer.

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:



Field Manager

DATE SIGNED:

07/06/2012

