

**Gateway West Transmission Line Project**  
**RAC Subcommittee Meeting Presentation to the RAC Notes – DRAFT**  
 Thursday, June 5, 2014, 9 am to 11 am (MDT)  
 BLM Boise District Office, Boise, Idaho

<b>NOTE TAKER</b>	Suzy Cavanagh (Tetra Tech)
<b>HANDOUTS</b>	RAC Meeting Agenda RAC Subcommittee Route Options Final Report RAC Subcommittee MEP Review Final Report

**AGENDA TOPICS**

<b>PRESENTATION OF SUBCOMMITTEE ROUTE OPTIONS FINAL REPORT</b>	KAREN STEENHOF
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RAC Introductions were made.

Jim Fincher, BLM Boise District Manager, thanked the RAC coordinators and gave a synopsis of what he asked the RAC subcommittee to do after the decision was made to defer the decision on the Gateway West Transmission Line Project Segments 8 & 9. He thanked the subcommittee on their professionalism and the open and collaborative way that they worked together. The BLM looks forward to hearing the subcommittee presentation both in regards to the routing options and the mitigation and enhancement portfolio; we'll compare those to what was done in the EIS. This information will be released to the public during scoping.

Karen Steenhof, RAC Subcommittee co-chair, gave a presentation to the RAC on the Route Options report. Karen thanked everyone for coming. We (the subcommittee) updated you (RAC) back in January on our progress, so I will keep the background information brief. Karen gave a brief background on the GWW project that was proposed and discussed the deferral of decisions on Segments 8 and 9. The preferred alternatives traversed unroaded lands in Owyhee county and in the communities of Melba, Murphy and Oreana. They are controversial because of sage grouse, scenic views and crossing private lands in Ada, Canyon and Owyhee counties. The decision was whether to put new transmission lines in the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). At the time the NCA was established, there were many transmission lines already existing. Research conducted from 1981 to 1989 found that the transmission lines enhanced the opportunities for raptor perching. Collision with transmission lines does not seem to be a big issue for raptors in this area. Raptors and ravens were attracted to the 500kV line.

The NCA was established in 1993, Karen defined what a NLCS unit is (also called National Conservation Lands). A BLM Manual came about in 2012 that asserts that BLM should avoid granting new rights-of-way (ROWs) in National Monuments and NCAs. The manual then gives discretion to the BLM that if they have to route transmission lines through monuments and NCAs then mitigation is required.

The subcommittee team was introduced to the RAC and Karen thanked everyone for their help. The subcommittee held 11 meetings and one work session. Twenty presentations were given during those meetings. The meetings had greater than 120 attendees with 22 individuals provided public input at one or more meetings. There were

2 field trips held (by Governor's Office of Energy Resources). At the first RAC subcommittee meeting, the subcommittee agreed to focus on the areas of Segments 8 and 9 from nodes 8-01 and 9-01 to the west in and around the NCA (in the Boise District). New information was presented to the subcommittee: new guidelines for transmission line separation criteria and the potential to co-locate (or double circuit) with existing 138-kV lines. The subcommittee decided to try to route the line options to reduce impacts to private property and residences.

The subcommittee identified river crossings as potential bottlenecks. The resources are the richest near the Snake River. We evaluated 10 crossings of the Snake River and determined which ones were acceptable or not acceptable. All 4 acceptable crossings are at places where there are already transmission lines crossing the Snake River. We evaluated 12 route options for Segment 8 and 14 route options for Segment 9. Some had already been evaluated in the EIS and some were new. Our Route Option report provides details on the route options, with a matrix of resources and maps showing each route option. After we looked at each route option, we tried to determine if we should rank the routes; however once we looked at the conflicts (matrix), one route option for each route seemed to rise to the top. For Segment 8, the majority (7 of 8) of subcommittee recommends the Summer Lake option. This route would parallel the PacifiCorp Summer Lake 500-kV transmission line across the NCA. The updated WECC separation criteria would allow the new transmission line to be 250 feet from the existing line. This route should minimize vegetation disturbance by reducing the amount of new access roads within the BOPNCA and elsewhere that would need to be constructed and maintained. The Companies plan to use existing roads near and beneath the existing 500-kV transmission line to minimize the overall disturbance footprint of the new line. Rather than constructing a completely new access road network for the route, they would use short spur roads from existing roads to provide access to new towers. This route would minimize impacts on communities and private property in the Kuna and Melba areas of Ada, Canyon, and Owyhee Counties and would avoid critical habitat for slickspot peppergrass. This route was modified to minimize impacts to the OCTC Alpha Sector and adjacent private property.

For Segment 9, the majority of the subcommittee recommends the Baja Road-Murphy Flat South route option. This option would double circuit the new 500-kV line with existing 138-kV lines for most of the distance through the NCA. The new line would incorporate and replace existing 138-kV lines near C. J. Strike Reservoir in Owyhee County and along Baja Road on public land in Ada and Elmore counties. The line would cross the Snake River near C.J. Strike Dam and above Swan Falls, near Sinker Butte, where an existing 138-kV transmission line crosses the Snake River. The new 500-kV line would traverse public land on Murphy Flat, avoiding historic Oregon Trail ruts. It would cross Highway 78 near the Rabbit Creek Trailhead, and continue north to the Hemingway Substation, outside of preliminary priority sage-grouse habitat and mainly out of view from most subdivisions in Owyhee County. The advantages of this route are that it would minimize impacts on communities and private property in Owyhee County. It would minimize the amount of new road that would need to be constructed and maintained within the NCA and in unroaded areas in Owyhee County. This route would minimize the construction of transmission towers and roads near Greater sage-grouse leks and within Greater sage-grouse habitat.

The subcommittee is aware of and sensitive to concerns that siting new transmission lines within the BOPNCA might set precedents for other National Conservation Lands.

We find that the NCA is unique among National Conservation Lands in that the habitat has been seriously degraded by a history of wildfires and a proliferation of invasive species. There was already a great deal of infrastructure within its boundaries at the time it was designated. Scientific research conducted within the NCA indicated that this infrastructure has been compatible with the resources for which the NCA was designated, and some raptor populations may benefit if new transmission towers are designed to provide nesting and perching sites. The subcommittee reviewed the requirements in the Manual and we recognize the need to mitigate or enhance the area if a transmission line is built. We'll address the Companies proposed Mitigation and Enhancement Portfolio (MEP) review shortly.

**PRESENTATION OF THE MINORITY CONCLUSION**

DANIELLE MURRAY

Danielle Murray, RAC Subcommittee participant, gave a presentation on the minority conclusions on the Route Option report. Danielle stated that she works for the Conservation Lands Foundation and their mission is to protect, restore and expand the National Conservation Lands Units (NCLs). Danielle showed some photos of other NCAs in surrounding states as well as the Bruneau River and Owyhee River wild and scenic sections in Idaho. The Conservation Lands Foundation works with "friends groups" around the nation, who work closely with the BLM around the nation, who work to protect these special areas.

I disagree with the consensus of the subcommittee. This has been a very open and collaborative process. I agree that the subcommittee was tasked with addressing new information that the BLM may not have had when doing the final environmental impact statement. The appendices in the report show the work that the subcommittee did and we did a great job working together. I do not endorse, recommend, or agree with ranking the proposed routes for Segments 8 and 9. The expertise and purpose of the subcommittee was to help BLM identify pros and cons of routes and new routes. The expertise and legal mandates of BLM have to meet the legal requirements of the NCA. The analysis that the subcommittee did was a bit biased to get the route that they wanted to see. I find that the excuse that the NCA is unique in that the habitat has been degraded does not apply. I think that this would be the last place you would put the power line (because it is degraded). The subcommittee stated that new transmission lines should have no adverse impact on raptors, that was Karen's research and we did not look at any other research. We reviewed the BLM manuals, however I don't think that was what the subcommittee was asked to do. We asked the BLM several times what they needed the subcommittee to do. The BLM did not ask us to give recommendations on route options. My recommendation is for the BLM to take a look at all of the work that was done for each route option and consider it during the NEPA process. I don't think that the BLM should take the subcommittee route recommendations.

I think the subcommittee did a great job on looking all of the route options and this is a complicated issue. Also, I don't think the subcommittee members are experts at interpreting BLM laws. I think that the BLM should look at all of the information presented in the subcommittee reports.

A question from the RAC: I am trying to understand who the RAC subcommittee minority is? Danielle stated that she is the minority. Neil Rimbey, subcommittee co-chair, stated that when the subcommittee first started into this process in December 2013, Betsy (Buffington) stated that she was glad there was a process, but she could not endorse a route through the NCA. We (the subcommittee) agreed with Betsy (and therefore

Danielle) that they could present a minority conclusion.

**PRESENTATION OF SUBCOMMITTEE MEP REVIEW  
FINAL REPORT**

KAREN STEENHOF

Karen Steenhof, RAC subcommittee co-chair, gave a presentation on the subcommittee evaluation of the MEP proposal (draft portfolio) presented by the Companies. The Companies submitted their draft portfolio during the comment period for the FEIS. The MEP is designed to go above and above the standard mitigation requirements. The MEP includes compensatory mitigation and enhancement requirements. Compensatory addresses residual impacts to try to get the area back to “baseline” conditions. The draft proposal has proposed that 43% of the funds go to habitat restoration and 57% of the funds go toward law enforcement. Enhancement is based on the construction footprint (larger than operational footprint) and proposes habitat restoration, law enforcement, land purchase, visitor enhancement; management oversight, and line removal. A management fund would be established for an oversight committee. The line removal proposed would be removal of two lower voltage lines in the NCA. The amounts are scalable based on miles of line that are proposed in the NCA, except the management oversight and line removal amounts which are static.

The amounts in the MEP proposal are based on the draft portfolio proposed routes. The metric can be applied regardless of which segment is chosen. Our report shows the estimated funding for each route option. The general consensus from the subcommittee was that the proposed funding was too low, however we did not feel like we had the expertise to determine how much funding would be appropriate. We recommend that the BLM through the NEPA process do an analysis to determine what is appropriate.

The subcommittee had concerns about the allocation of the funding. The MEP did not provide for enhancement of raptor populations and scientific resources and values (research and monitoring). We recommend that the companies revise the proposed allocations. And we recommend that the following categories in order of priority: enhancement of raptor populations, habitat restoration, research and monitoring, implementation and oversight committee, visitor management, and land purchase.

The subcommittee was pleased that the MEP proposed law enforcement we feel that an expanded and onsite presence will reduce degradation caused by irresponsible public recreational use. The BLM already has a robust public awareness program, so we don’t feel that the money should be focused on public education. We discussed land purchase or whether to invest monies to restore and enhance lands; however if land purchase is used, we suggest some degree of funding be included to help manage the lands that are purchased.

The permitting process should not allow transmission line construction during nesting season and we recommend that biologists and engineers work together to design towers that are raptor friendly (nesting platforms) and raven non-friendly. While the lines will be removed, we think that poles should be left in place for raptor nesting and perching.

Enhancing raptor populations happen by enhancing prey base which benefit by enhancing habitat. The lands in the NCA have been degraded by fire and invasive plants; they need to be restored. In this climate, it will be extremely difficult to reestablish habitat and we would prefer to see larger areas treated instead of smaller areas. We recommend an integrated and adaptive approach.

Looking at landscape scale strategy to preserve remnant sage-brush patches should be a

priority. Fire breaks and fire suppression are recommended. These goals could be accomplished through a variety of approaches addressed in the report. Research and monitoring at all trophic levels should take place. Vegetation monitoring plan, monitor the effects of transmission lines, monitoring trends in raptors (raptor population monitoring), prey population monitoring (small mammals such as ground squirrels and jack rabbits), studies of lead in the environment (new access roads will increase recreation and more lead could be introduced), and a data repository to assemble data.

Keys to success are a long-term approach, an oversight committee established as soon as possible, and to ensure that funds are available over the long term, we recommend long-term management.

**RAC QUESTIONS TO THE SUBCOMMITTEE**

RAC

RAC member question – what recreational uses will be allowed on the roads? Response: a travel management plan is currently being prepared; it will designate specific uses. So is it likely that motorized vehicles will be allowed? Motorized vehicles are currently allowed on designated roads.

RAC member question – will co-location of lines occur near Rabbit Creek? Response: the lines near Rabbit Creek are distribution lines. Distribution and transmission lines will not be collocated, they are separate, and so there will not be co-location in the Rabbit Creek area.

RAC member question – You say in the report that a substation will be removed; where is it? Response: The Gage Station in the area east and southeast of Melba on the NCA will be removed.

**RAC VOTE REGARDING SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS**

RAC

The RAC chair, Gene Gray, stated that he would accept a motion to accept the workings of the subcommittee and forward to the Boise District Manager. It was motioned and seconded to accept all of the workings of the subcommittee. Sara Schmidt, RAC member, offered her support of the majority conclusion presented by the subcommittee. Kathryn Alder, RAC member, voted to support the routes recommended by the majority by the subcommittee. Alayne Blickle motioned to accept the workings and the motion was seconded by Gayle Poorman and Steve Damele.

**CONCLUSION**

Jim Fincher presented each member of the subcommittee with an award for all of the work that they have done leading the subcommittee effort and all of the hours they have donated to get through the process. I think this process has been and will be a good model for the future on how a RAC and subcommittee can work well with the BLM.

Tim Murphy, BLM Acting State Director, stated that the BLM appreciates all of the collaboration, time, travel, etc. that went into this effort. The companies provided very helpful inside on changes that that can occur and provided very helpful information. Although the subcommittee has not come to total consensus, what we have is a very useful body of information to use going forward. With the conclusion of this work, the BLM will begin a public scoping process, look at what the RAC brought forward, and look at what was done in the EIS. We now have a highly concentrated effort. BLM wants to work as rapidly as possible with the companies to work on the MEP package. We will start on public scoping. How long will this take? I don't think there is a good opportunity

for an EA, but we won't make that determination until public scoping is done. Looking at the timeframe of a potential supplemental EIS, it could take 18 months.

Neil Rimbey, RAC Subcommittee co-chair stated that he would encourage the BLM to use the RAC through this process; the subcommittee has expertise to help the BLM. Tim Murphy responded that the matrix will be very useful in this process; it would have taken us a lot of time to get to that point. Gene – please use folks on the RAC for their expertise. Tim – yes we are listening and at the end of the day Jim has a tough decision to make. We will listen and will have transparency through this process.