



BRIEFING STATEMENT

BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

MONTANA STATE OFFICE • 5001 SOUTHGATE DRIVE • BILLINGS, MONTANA 59101 • WWW.BLM.GOV/MT

March 2012

SUBJECT: MOUNTAIN STATES TRANSMISSION INTERTIE (MSTI)

I. SUMMARY:

New transmission lines are necessary to support new energy development and transport energy to markets in the West. When transmission is proposed on public lands managed by the BLM in the Montana/Dakotas, the BLM will process the application, and if warranted, issue right of way (ROW) authorization where public lands are crossed. When a proposal crosses multiple jurisdictions, the BLM may be the lead agency, a co-lead with federal or state agencies, or a cooperating agency for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

II. BACKGROUND:

MSTI is an interstate 500kV alternating current transmission line project proposed by NorthWestern Energy and crossing lands in Montana and Idaho. The project entails a number of components including:

- A transmission line 415-500 miles in length, depending upon the alternative;
- Construction of a new substation near Townsend, Mont.;
- Construction of a new facility adjacent to the existing Mill Creek substation near Anaconda, Mont.;
- Modifications to the existing Midpoint substation near Jerome, Idaho; and
- Ancillary facilities to facilitate operations of the transmission line.

The BLM is the lead federal agency for NEPA compliance and BLM-Montana is the lead state for the ROW grant issuance and administration. Federal cooperating agencies include the U.S. Forest Service, Department of Energy, Agricultural Research Service, Bureau of Reclamation, and National Park Service. State agencies involved include the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (co-lead under the Montana Major Facility Siting Act), Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation. Local governments participating in the process include the counties of Broadwater, Jefferson, Madison, and Beaverhead; the city of Dillon; and the town of Whitehall. The Idaho Office of Energy Resources is also a cooperating agency. Agencies having permitting authority will issue authorizations for segments crossing lands for which they are responsible.

A lawsuit filed by Jefferson County, Mont., against the Montana Department of Environmental Quality was dismissed in October 2011 by the Montana Supreme Court. A draft environmental impact statement (EIS), prepared by a third-party contract, continues to be developed, with release to the public anticipated in late summer 2012. The BLM continues work on the EIS including intensive review of proposal local routing options (LROs) as well as a programmatic agreement under the National Historic Preservation Act to resolve adverse effects to cultural resources, consultation with affected tribes, and development of mitigation plans for species of concern (i.e., sage-grouse).

PUBLIC INTEREST:

There is diverse interest ranging from support of developing critical infrastructure versus the opinion that major interstate transmission lines are not needed. Issues revolve around a variety of concerns including route locations (public lands vs. private lands), impacts to resources (wildlife and habitat, cultural resources, visual intrusion), and public health and safety. Public interest in the project is increasing; this includes a desire for more involvement in the process and availability of information. Extensive work with county governments and tribal interest continues to occur.

CONTACTS:

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