

Mountain States Transmission Intertie Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter

MSTI

Montana Department of Environmental Quality

Bureau of Land Management

Welcome to the Spring 2009 newsletter for the Mountain States Transmission Intertie Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you with general information about the project and to update you on where we are in the process of evaluating alternatives. We also provide contact information and websites if you want more detail.

What is MSTI?

The Mountain States Transmission Intertie, or MSTI, is a 500 kilovolt (kV) electric transmission line proposed by NorthWestern Energy, between Townsend, Montana, and the Midpoint Substation just north of Twin Falls, Idaho (approximately 375 miles). The figure on page 3 shows the alternatives being considered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) at this time. Certain adjustments to these alternatives are also being considered to reduce impacts. These smaller-scale adjustments are referred to as Local Routing Options (LROs) and are not shown on the figure, but those in Montana can be viewed at DEQ website at end of this newsletter.

NorthWestern Energy has submitted a permit application under the Major Facility Siting Act to the DEQ and has requested a Right-of-Way over the public lands managed by the BLM, USFS, and US Department of Energy along the proposed route. The review of these submittals by the agencies includes the completion of an EIS.

What is the EIS Process?

The EIS is underway on this project. There are two lead agencies that are collaborating to complete the EIS. They are the BLM and the DEQ. The alternatives and LROs are being analyzed by comparing impacts within many resource areas, some of which are:

- Human Health & Safety (including electric and magnetic fields)
- Visual Resources
- Recreation & Land use
- Socioeconomics
- Soils & Geology
- Biological Resources (wildlife & vegetation)
- Water Resources & Wetlands
- Property Values

The EIS involves input from the public, tribes, and responsible agencies to develop a range of alternatives. Based on the analysis of effects, the lead agencies select a preferred alternative and identify mitigation measures as needed to lessen impacts.



Transmission Line
Support Structure

The Basic Steps in the EIS Process

The following are the basic steps in completing this EIS:

Step 1. Scoping - this is the process by which the agencies receive guidance from the public, American Indian tribes, and governmental agencies (e.g. Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks) on what the important issues are on for this project. We do not reply explicitly to each comment but rather, use these comments to identify a range of reasonable alternatives in the EIS. The project alternatives on the following page were developed based on input received from comment letters and forms and from discussions at numerous public and agency meetings. Scoping also helps guide analysis of the alternatives. For example, we have heard that potential effects to human health in proximity to power lines is an important concern. We are therefore, considering that topic carefully. The most commonly raised issues in scoping were:

- Property values
- Health effects
- Weeds
- Visual impacts
- Wildlife (especially sage-grouse) impacts

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Step 2. Technical Analysis and Completion of Draft EIS - The Draft EIS contains the analysis of alternatives and mitigating measures. Some of the sections in the Draft EIS will be:

- Purpose and Need for the Project
- Descriptions of Alternatives
- Existing Condition of the Project Area
- Environmental Consequences

There will be a public comment period when this Draft EIS is released. This comment period will include public meetings in Montana and Idaho.

Step 3. Preparation of a Final EIS - Based upon all public comments received on the Draft EIS, the document will be revised as deemed appropriate by the DEQ and BLM. The deciding officers in each cooperating agency will then make their decisions based on the results presented in the Final EIS.



Sage-grouse

What is the Timeline for this Process?

Milestone	Anticipated Date
Draft EIS Published and Available for Public Review	October, 2009
Public Comment Period on Draft EIS	October-November, 2009
Final EIS Published	January, 2010

Where You can Get More Information

Maps and information about the proposed MSTI project can be found on the BLM or DEQ websites at:

http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/lands_realty/projects.htm

<http://www.deq.mt.gov/MFS/MSTI/MSTIindex.asp>

NorthWestern Energy also has a website for the project at www.msti500kv.com

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Thank you for your continued interest in the MSTI EIS process!

