

PROPOSED EXPANDED STUDY AREA FOR THE SUNZIA SOUTHWEST TRANSMISSION PROJECT

Expanded Study Area

The formal scoping period for the SunZia Project Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was extended through August 28, 2009 (90 days). During the scoping process for the SunZia Project, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received numerous comments regarding the proposed and alternative transmission line routes identified within the Preliminary Study Area. The results of scoping are used to determine the appropriate study plan for the EIS in order to address the issues and concerns identified by the public and agencies, and to determine the scope of the study that must include an adequate range of alternatives. Alternative routes or sub-route segments may be added, modified, or deleted from further study. In response to scoping comments to date, the BLM is recommending that additional alternative routes should be considered for detailed analysis and comparison in the EIS process. Additional alternative corridors for further consideration in the New Mexico area could provide alternative connections between the proposed Midpoint Substation site near Deming, and the proposed SunZia-East Substation termination site in Lincoln County.

An area of major concern is in the vicinity of the San Antonio community, where the proposed route crosses the Rio Grande, north of the Bosque Del Apache National Wildlife Refuge. Many comments have included strong opposition to the proposed route in that location, and requests to consider alternatives that avoid the San Antonio/Rio Grande crossing. Also, both the Socorro and Sierra county boards of supervisors issued resolutions requesting that additional alternatives be considered. One alternative route identified for consideration is located along the western boundary and in the northwest corner of the White Sands Missile Range (WSMR). That route requires approximately 15 to 20 miles of new right-of-way on military lands.

Public comments have also included requests to consider other alternative routes crossing the Rio Grande in Dona Ana County to the south of Las Cruces through the Anthony Gap, south and east of the WSMR. Potentially, a route in this corridor could be located on BLM, state, and private lands, and also public lands withdrawn for military use by Ft. Bliss on the Dona Ana Range or McGregor Range. The use of the one-mile-wide utility corridor for a transmission line, located adjacent to NM State Highway 54 and designated in the McGregor Range Resource Management Plan Amendment, could be permitted with concurrence of the BLM and Ft. Bliss. This potential alternative route consideration could continue north of the McGregor Range, along the eastern boundary of the WSMR within Otero and Lincoln counties on military land or a combination of BLM, state, and private lands, and terminate at the proposed SunZia-East Substation.

Due to the initial opposition and comments received concerning the preliminary proposed and alternative routes, the BLM is seeking to expand the study area and consider alternative

routes/corridors, including a route south and east of the WSMR, utilizing the one-mile wide utility corridor through the McGregor Range.

WSMR has indicated that it will participate as a cooperating agency on the SunZia Project EIS and BLM has also invited Ft. Bliss to participate. Additional meetings will be held with the BLM -SunZia Project ID Team and public outreach will take place to provide information on the expansion of the study area, and identify potential alternatives within the study area to be considered in the EIS. The BLM is also proposing to have additional public scoping meetings in communities located along the proposed new expanded study area. Specific locations, dates, and times will be announced in the future.

To view a map of the proposed expanded study area for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, go to maps section of this website.