

Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI) SunZia Southwest Transmission Project

Environmental Assessment No.: DOI-BLM-NM-900-2015-1

Introduction

The Final Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Resource Management Plan Amendments (Final EIS) for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project was completed in June 2013. The Final EIS analyzed and disclosed the potential effects of the proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (Project). The Project would include two 500- kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, substations, and ancillary facilities that would be located on federal, state, and private lands between central New Mexico and central Arizona. SunZia Transmission, LLC has submitted an application for a right-of-way to construct, operate, and maintain the Project on public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

BLM published the Notice of Availability of the Final EIS in the *Federal Register* on June 14, 2013. Based on unresolved issues relating to the impact to military readiness and operations, the Department of Defense (DOD) objected to a segment of the Agency Preferred Alternative route in an area north of White Sands Missile Range (WSMR) known as the Northern Call-Up Area. Following discussions between DOD and BLM, the DOD agreed that the implementation of certain proposed mitigation measures would effectively minimize impacts on military readiness and operations. As relevant to this Environmental Assessment, one of the mitigation measures is a proposal to bury a total of at least five miles of the transmission line in up to three segments within the Northern Call-Up Area.

In order to consider the proposed mitigation measure to bury a portion of the transmission line, The BLM has used the attached Environmental Assessment to determine whether the proposed mitigation measure to bury a portion of the transmission line requires supplementation of the Final EIS under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The EA, in accordance with CEQ regulations, examined whether the burial mitigation measure represents either a substantial change to the proposed action or significant new circumstances or information that are relevant to environmental concerns, beyond those previously analyzed in the Final EIS (40 C.F.R. § 1502.9(c)(1)).

Finding of No New Significant Impact

For all potentially affected resources, comparisons of impacts associated with the proposed burial mitigation measure to those disclosed in the Final EIS are included in Chapter 3 of the attached Environmental Assessment. In order to determine whether the impacts analyzed in the EA are significant, I have considered the factors of context and intensity, as described in 40 CFR § 1508.27, for the proposed mitigation measure.

The context of the proposed mitigation measure is a site-specific action involving approximately 5 miles of the proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Project in Torrance and Socorro

Counties, New Mexico. This EA analyzes the effects of the proposed mitigation measure, which would involve the burial of approximately 5 miles of the proposed 515 mile transmission line. The proposed mitigation measure would cross BLM, state, and private lands within the existing corridor analyzed in the Final EIS, and would cross three grazing allotments, impacts to which were analyzed in the Final EIS.

Intensity refers to the severity of potential impact. Based on the analysis of new information described above, there would be no new significant impacts (either beneficial or adverse) as a result of the proposed mitigation measure. The proposed mitigation measure would not affect the public's health and safety in a manner differently than the BLM Preferred Alternative as described in the Final EIS. There are no unique characteristics of the geographic area which would be adversely affected by the proposed mitigation measure. The effects of the proposed mitigation measures on the quality of the human environment reduce areas of controversy described in the Final EIS, such as impacts to current and future military readiness and operations. The EA describes the effects of constructing, operating and maintaining the proposed mitigation measure. The effects of the proposed mitigation measure are within the scope and scale of uncertain, unique, or unknown risks described in the Final EIS. The proposed mitigation measure does not set a precedent for future actions with significant effects and does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposed mitigation measure would not contribute to significant effects above and beyond those already described in the Final EIS. The proposed mitigation measure will not adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures or objects listed in the National Register of Historic Places beyond that disclosed in the Final EIS. There would be no new effects to habitat for threatened or endangered species beyond those disclosed in the Final EIS. Mitigation measures and design features will minimize or prevent adverse effects to other wildlife species and their habitat. The proposed mitigation measure would not violate any Federal, State, or local laws or regulations imposed for the protection of the environment.

I have compared these factors to the effects of the no action alternative, the BLM Preferred Alternative as described in the Final EIS. Based on these comparisons, I have concluded that the proposed burial mitigation measure is not a substantial change from the preferred alternative analyzed in the SunZia Southwest Final EIS and would not involve any significant impacts beyond the impacts previously analyzed described in the SunZia Southwest Final EIS. In light of these conclusions, I have determined that BLM does not need to supplement the Final EIS in accordance with 40 C.F.R. § 1502.9(c)(1).

Jesse J. Juen
State Director

Date