

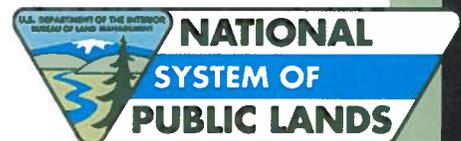
**Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative**

# **Mid-Mile Fiber Project Right-of-Way Application**

## **Finding of No Significant Impact**

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2011-0008-EA

**July 2011**



## **Background**

Plumas Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative (PSREC) is a member-owned electric cooperative that provides electric and related services to its member owners in accordance with the reliability standards defined by the Rural Utilities Service, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, North American Electric Reliability Corporation, and Western Electric Coordinating Council.

PSREC serves 6,500 customers in Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra counties in California, and the western edge of Washoe County in Nevada. Many of the community Critical Anchor Institutions in this rural area of northeastern California currently lack adequate access to the bandwidth required to support e-healthcare, advanced learning opportunities, economic development opportunities, and communication needs. PSREC plans to meet the broadband needs of these institutions by constructing 185 miles of new fiber for a middle mile network to deliver broadband speeds between 45 Mbps and 10 Gbps.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce is the federal lead for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Sierra Front Field Office (SFFO) has participated in the development of the *Mid-Mile Fiber Project Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2011-0008-EA). The SFFO would authorize construction of underground and overhead fiber optic lines on lands within its jurisdiction. Several other federal agencies have also participated in this project, including BLM's Eagle Lake Field Office in California, the Humboldt-Toiyable National Forest in Nevada, and the Plumas National Forest in California. These offices would process the right of way (ROW) authorizations on the lands that they administer.

Of the approximately 185 miles of the proposed new fiber cable installation, approximately 162 miles would be placed on existing pole infrastructure; the remaining 21 miles would be installed underground. PSREC has submitted to the SFFO rights-of-way (ROW) applications (SF-299) for the construction of fiber optic broadband lines across public lands administered by BLM in Washoe County, Nevada and Lassen County, California. Approximately 8.8 miles of overhead cable is to be hung on existing PSREC utility poles in Lassen County within SFFO jurisdiction. In addition, construction of approximately 2.7 miles of underground cable would be constructed within the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) U.S. 395 right-of-way. In Nevada, approximately 0.6 miles of underground cable would be constructed within the Nevada Department of Transportation (NDOT) U.S. 395 highway right-of-way and approximately 0.7 miles of cable would be strung on existing PSREC utility poles in Washoe County.

## **Land Use Plan Conformance**

This project is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001). Sections that specifically apply to the Proposed Action include:

- LND-7, Administrative Actions #6. "Exchanges and minor non-Bureau initiated realty proposals will be considered where the analysis indicates they are beneficial to the public."

- ROW-4, Administrative Actions #3 “...applicants for right-of-way grants...are subject to standard approval procedures outlined in the right-of-way regulations (43 CFR 2800)...”

### **Finding**

Based on the analysis in the *Mid-Mile Fiber Project Environmental Assessment* (DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2011-0008-EA), I have determined that this action will not have a significant effect on the human environment and an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be prepared. This finding and conclusion is based on the consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality’s (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and the intensity of impacts described in the EA. Furthermore, I have determined that the EA is adequate and complete, and the EA is hereby adopted to meet the SFFO’s compliance needs under NEPA.

### **Context:**

The project area is located in northwestern Nevada and northeastern California, the Honey Lake/Long Valley high desert environment along the US 395 north-south corridor. Susanville, California, is located on the northern boundary of the project area; Reno, Nevada forms the southern boundary and Quincy, California is located on the western boundary of the project area. The project area is rural in character and there is little evidence of a built environment in the surrounding area. Farm houses, ranches and small settlements are scattered throughout the Honey Lake, Sierra and Long Valleys, mostly concentrated along US 395 in both Lassen County and Washoe County.

### **Intensity:**

1) *Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.*

The Proposed Action would benefit customers served by PSREC with access to broadband by facilitating more affordable and accessible broadband service for up to approximately 14,000 households, 2,100 businesses, and an additional 280 anchor institutions by enabling local internet service providers to utilize the project’s open access network and creating a broadband path to support regional next generation 9-1-1 and other public safety services, and enable telemedicine at regional correctional facilities, allowing for annual prisoner transport savings of up to \$10,000 per prisoner seeking care. Adverse effects from the Proposed Action would primarily be short-term. During construction, there would be minor increases in vehicle emissions from equipment and employees, and underground trenching adjacent to highways would occur. The project area is highly disturbed and urbanized in some areas. All activities would include best management practices to minimize adverse effects.

2) *The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety.*

The Proposed Action would have no effect on public health or safety. Increasing broadband to rural areas in northwestern Nevada and northeastern California would be anticipated to have a beneficial effect on those emergency services that rely on broadband use to exchange information.

3) *Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.*

The portions of the project area within the SFFO-administration do not include any park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers or other ecologically critical areas. A Class III cultural resources inventory has been completed to identify historical or cultural resources on SFFO-administered lands. Known historic or cultural resources would be avoided during implementation of the project.

4) *The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.*

The project area is primarily in developed areas; along existing overhead pole lines and highway corridors. Overhead and underground utilities are a common occurrence, and while there may be minor and temporary disruption to traffic; these activities are not highly controversial.

5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.*

The construction of overhead and underground fiber optic cable is a well understood activity. The project would occur in areas where other overhead and underground utilities already exist. There are no uncertain or unknown risks.

6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.*

The Proposed Action would not set a precedent for future actions; any future action would require separate compliance under NEPA and other applicable federal laws.

7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.*

Through implementation of best management practices and other measures, short-term adverse effects from the Proposed Action have been avoided or minimized. These minor adverse effects would not contribute to cumulatively significant impacts.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

NTIA is lead federal agency for compliance with the NHPA. The Proposed Action would have no adverse effects to sites eligible for listing under the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP) for portions of the project on SFFO-administered lands involving underground fiber optic cable installation. Class III cultural resource inventories have been completed for these SFFO-administered lands (Cultural Resources Report-03-2567). Known historic properties on SFFO-managed lands have been identified and will be avoided. Protocols have been established should an unknown discovery occur during project implementation. For portions of the project on SFFO-managed lands which involve overhead fiber optic cable installation, the project would have no effect.

9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the ESA of 1973.*

The Proposed Action would have no effect to endangered or threatened species or their critical habitat for portions of the project which occur on SFFO-administered lands.

10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.*

The Proposed Action will not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

  
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Linda J. Kelly  
Field Manager  
Sierra Front Field Office

7/27/11  
Date