

ON Line Project

Draft Supplemental EIS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following sections summarize the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (DSEIS) for the One Nevada Transmission Line Project (ON Line Project). This information is provided as a convenient synopsis for the public, but is not a substitute for review of the complete DSEIS. This summary provides a general overview of the proposed ON Line Project and its purpose and need; briefly describes the Proposed Action and other alternatives; and summarizes major impacts for key resources associated with the Proposed Action and the Action Alternative.

This DSEIS was prepared in response to an amended SF 299 *Application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands* for the ON Line Project, submitted by NV Energy. The facilities of the ON Line Project were previously proposed as components of the Ely Energy Center Project (EEC) as originally proposed by NV Energy in 2006. On February 9, 2009, NV Energy announced its decision to postpone the permitting and development of the EEC coal-fired power plant and associated supporting facilities until such time that carbon capture/sequestration are commercially feasible, but to continue with the permitting and development of the substation, transmission, and communication components between its southern and northern service territories, and upgrade of existing substations, now referred to as the ON Line Project. The purpose of the DSEIS is for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to evaluate and disclose potential impacts of the proposed development of the ON Line Project, and determine whether to grant rights-of-way (ROWs).

The BLM is the lead federal agency for this DSEIS. Originally, the EEC environmental review team included the BLM as the lead federal agency with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Park Service (NPS), and White Pine County as cooperating agencies. Once the BLM decided to proceed with a DSEIS due to the change in the Proposed Action from the EEC to the ON Line Project, the EPA and NPS decided to withdraw their cooperating agency status for the reduced project scope. The one cooperating agency for this DSEIS is White Pine County.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) for the ON Line Project SEIS was published in the Federal Register on July 29, 2009, initiating a 30-day scoping period. The issues evaluated in this DSEIS are generally derived from public comments originally made during the EEC Project scoping period and summarized in the EEC EIS Scoping Summary issued in April 2007 (BLM-JBR 2007). Further, although no additional public scoping meetings were held for the ON Line Project, any public comments received during the 30-day scoping period, initiated by the NOI, were also fully reviewed and considered.

Proposed Action

NV Energy proposes to construct and operate a 236-mile transmission line with telecommunication and appurtenant facilities in White Pine, Nye, Lincoln, and Clark counties, a substation near Robinson Summit in White Pine County, a loop-in of the existing Falcon-Gonder

345 kV transmission line at the new Robinson Summit Substation, expansion of the existing Falcon Substation in Eureka County, addition of new equipment inside the existing Harry Allen Substation in Clark County, and access roads to all facilities collectively referred to as the ON Line Project. The Proposed Action components, including the new substation at Robinson Summit and transmission line and telecommunication facilities, were described and analyzed in the EEC Draft Environmental Impact Statement (i.e., Robinson Summit to Harry Allen (RS-HA) Line #1) as transmission line segments 6C, 8, 9B, 9A, 9D, and 11.

To summarize, the components of the transmission facilities would include:

Robinson Summit 500/345 kV Substation, approximately 108 acres in size, adjacent to the Southwest Intertie Project (SWIP) Utility Corridor in White Pine County

One Nevada 500 kV Transmission Line and telecommunication appurtenances, approximately 236 miles in length, between the proposed Robinson Summit Substation and the existing Harry Allen Substation in Clark County mostly within the SWIP Utility Corridor

Falcon-Gonder 345 kV transmission line loop-in at the Robinson Summit 500/345 kV Substation

A permanent access road into the Robinson Summit Substation and temporary access roads into all facilities along the 236-mile project route

Expansion of the existing Falcon Substation on private property in Eureka County to add 345 kV series compensation equipment

Addition of 500 kV electrical connection equipment within the existing footprint of the Harry Allen Substation in Clark County

Action Alternative

The Action Alternative would consist of all of the same facilities as described under the Proposed Action, however, the 500 kV transmission line and telecommunication facilities would follow a parallel route alignment approximately 1,800 feet to the east of the Proposed Action alignment within the SWIP Utility Corridor. The transmission line segments of the Action Alternative include 6C, 8, 9B, 9C, 9D and 11. Alternative segments of the Action Alternative include Segment 9A instead of 9C as well as Segment 10 instead of 9B, 9A, and 9D. Alternative segment 9A deviates from the SWIP Utility Corridor and alternative Segment 10 deviates from the SWIP Utility Corridor as well but for the southern portion follows and occurs within an adjacent federally-designated utility corridor. The linear distance of the Action Alternative would be shorter than the Proposed Action by about 2 miles, for a total length of 234 miles. The facilities and alignment described under the Action Alternative were also described and analyzed in the EEC Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (i.e., RS-HA Line #2).

BLM Actions

BLM actions for this project would include issuance of ROWs necessary for construction and operation of the ON Line Project. ROWs issued for 30 years, with options to renew, would be necessary for the operation and maintenance of all ON Line Project facilities located on BLM-administered public land. In addition, short-term ROWs would be required from the BLM to accommodate construction activities such as temporary access roads, batch plant sites, structure site work areas, pulling and tensioning sites, wire splicing sites, and material/equipment staging.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Proposed Action and Alternatives

In **Chapter 4** of this DSEIS the environmental effects of the various components of the Proposed Action are evaluated and compared to the Action and No Action Alternatives, as detailed in **Chapter 2**. The primary environmental impacts for the components of the Proposed Action and Alternatives, including No Action, are outlined in **Table 2.6-1**. The environmental impacts of these alternatives and components are summarized in the following narrative.

Water Resources

Construction

Although not anticipated, the most likely impacts to surface water from the ON Line Project would be from surface disturbance during construction.

Best Management Practices (BMPs) would be implemented at all locations to avoid and/or minimize surface water quality impacts during the construction phase. Short-term, minor effects may include the degradation of seasonal surface runoff through vegetation removal or soil compaction.

Under the Proposed Action, wetlands within the project area would not be directly or indirectly impacted. Wetland areas would be spanned by project facilities, and no structures would be placed within these wetlands.

No direct impacts to surface waters and wetlands are anticipated since all such waters can be spanned with no construction disturbance to the surface waters, and BMPs would be implemented and uniformly followed. There would be no impacts to groundwater.

Operations

No impacts to surface water resources as a result of operations of the ON Line Project are anticipated. There would be no impacts to groundwater.

Geology and Minerals

The ON Line Project could locally alter surface topography. Authorized mining claims, oil and gas leases, and geothermal leases occur near the vicinity of project elements. The anticipated level of impacts to geology and minerals would be negligible.

Paleontological Resources

Paleontological resources are present in the general area of the Proposed Action and Action Alternative. Sediments with varying potentials (or sensitivities) to contain paleontological resources have been identified in the project area. With adherence to the mitigation measures described in **Section 4.4.2.5** minor impacts to paleontological resources would result. If significant fossils were found during construction, they would be mitigated under direction of the BLM or other appropriate agency paleontological resource specialist. Disturbance of areas with high potential for containing paleontological resources would be avoided to the extent possible as addressed in a Construction, Operation and Maintenance Plan (COM Plan) that would be developed and reviewed by the BLM prior to construction.

Soils

Minor physical and chemical changes to the soil are expected to occur due to mixing during initial salvage operations and when placed in stockpiles for future reclamation use. Physical impacts to soil resources during construction and reclamation would include compaction and crushing of the soil and soil crust by equipment during salvage and stockpiling. Physical effects of soil compaction would be short-term, minor to moderate, and include reduced permeability and porosity, damage to microbotic crusts, increased bulk density, decreased available water holding capacity, increased erosion potential, reduced gaseous exchange, and loss of soil structure. Potential impacts to soil resources would be similar for the Proposed Action and Action Alternative. Reclamation of the temporarily disturbed areas would return these soils to productivity by being utilized as growth medium in reseeded areas, while unreclaimed areas would be permanently eliminated from potential production.

Air Quality

The Proposed Action and Action Alternative include construction and operation of the same substation facilities as well as linear transmission and telecommunication facilities, with slight differences in the linear route alignments between Robinson Summit and Harry Allen Substations. The construction activities would generate air pollutant emissions. However, there would be little difference as far as quantities of construction emissions between the Proposed Action and the Action Alternative, operational impacts would be minor, associated with routine maintenance surveys, maintenance activity that would represent a fraction of the construction emissions profile, and small quantities of SF₆ loss from gas-insulated electrical equipment that would make a minor contribution of greenhouse gas. Both the Proposed Action and the Action Alternative would meet federal and state air quality standards.

Vegetation

Vegetation

Both permanent and temporary vegetation impacts would occur as a result of construction, operation, and maintenance of the ON Line Project. Impacts would occur during construction where project elements would be built, resulting in vegetation loss. These impacts would be long-term where permanent facilities are built. Temporary impacts to vegetation would occur at construction-related disturbances that would then be reclaimed after construction. **Tables 4.7-1** and **4.7-4** show the approximate acres of permanent impacts of the Proposed Action and the Action Alternative by vegetative community.

Noxious and Non-native, Invasive Weeds

A total of 16 noxious and non-native, invasive weed species were identified for the project area through existing data and field observations (**Table 3.7-1**). The spread of these species through new disturbance areas related to construction of the ON Line Project is an issue of concern. A BLM Weed Risk Assessment for Noxious and Non-Native, Invasive Weeds was completed, and an Integrated Weed Management Plan to be prepared as part of the COM Plan and approved by the BLM Weed Coordinator for the ON Line Project would address the control of noxious weed communities in the project area to address this concern.

Special-Status Plant Species

Hanging bladderpod, a species that has no federal or state status but is considered at-risk by the Nevada Natural Heritage Program (NNHP), was found along an unnamed ephemeral

channel at the Robinson Summit Substation site. Areas of the SWIP Utility Corridor contain sensitive species including: White River catseye (*Cryptantha welshii*) and Tiehm's blazing star (*Mentzelia tiemhii*). Special-status plant species have the potential to occur in locations within the project area that contain suitable habitat and resource conditions, particularly in Lincoln and Clark counties. During the design of project facilities, structures would be sited to avoid known special-status plant communities within the project area to the greatest extent practical. Pre-construction surveys would also allow for avoidance of special-status plant communities within the project area to the extent practical. Impacts to special-status plant communities would be mitigated, if not avoided, according to appropriate measures identified in the COM Plan and Restoration Plan approved by the BLM botanist, thereby rendering impacts to special-status plant communities negligible.

Wildlife

Big game species within the project area consist primarily of pronghorn antelope (*Antilocapra americana*), mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), Rocky Mountain elk (*Cervus canadensis nelsoni*), and two subspecies of bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis nelsoni* and *Ovis canadensis canadensis*). The following categories of wildlife are abundant, widespread, and inhabit or forage within the majority of the project area: bats, small mammals, predatory mammals, reptiles, migratory birds, and upland game birds.

Sensitive species are known to occur within the two BLM Districts that encompass the project area. The higher profile species include the Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), greater sage-grouse (*Centrocercus urophasianus*), pygmy rabbit (*Brachylagus idahoensis*), western burrowing owl (*Athene cunicularia hypugaea*), and banded gila monster (*Heloderma suspectum cinctum*).

The project area is home to many types of raptors including hawks, owls, eagles, accipiters, and falcons. The habitat types in the project area provide numerous nesting, perching, and foraging opportunities for a variety of raptor species from early spring (February/March) to late summer (August). Surveys for raptor nests in high potential habitats occurring within portions of the project area were conducted for this DSEIS. Twelve species of raptors were observed during baseline surveys. **Figures 3.8-3a-b** show the location of previously recorded and newly identified known raptor areas and nest locations within 2 miles of the project area.

Sagebrush vegetation communities, comprising nearly 25 percent of the project area, have been identified as Priority A habitat under the *Coordinated Implementation Plan for Bird Conservation in Nevada*. Priority A habitat is defined as habitat being under high threat, having high opportunity, and high value to birds statewide (Nevada Steering Committee Intermountain Joint Venture 2005).

Wildlife observed within the project area is listed in **Appendix 3D**.

The ON Line Project would permanently impact wildlife habitat at the Robinson Summit Substation and within portions of the long-term ROWs for the transmission line facilities. These impacts to wildlife would likely be long-term but minor, as the vegetative communities/wildlife habitat present within each of the project elements are common and widespread throughout the area. Indirect impacts would result from the temporary displacement of species utilizing these areas into adjacent undisturbed areas. Some small and less mobile wildlife species could potentially be killed or injured during construction activities.

Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, and Candidate Species

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) identified four threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate (TEPC) species listed under the Endangered Species Act that are known or expected to occur within the counties where the Proposed Action and Action Alternative are proposed (USFWS 2007a). These species include desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii* - Mojave Population), Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*), southwestern willow flycatcher (*Epidonax traillii extimus*), and western yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*). Impacts to the desert tortoise are anticipated as transmission line Segments 9, 10, and 11 would occur within desert tortoise critical and known suitable habitat. No suitable habitats for the other three species are present within or adjacent to the project area. Potential for direct impacts to the desert tortoise are expected to be either avoided or greatly minimized through the implementation of BMPs and applicable mitigation measures identified in applicable Biological Opinions.

Range

The ON Line Project would be constructed on a landscape dominated by arid rangelands. Most of these lands are managed by the BLM for multiple compatible uses and are divided into grazing allotments used principally for cattle grazing, some sheep grazing, and wildlife habitat. The facilities of the ON Line Project would be constructed and operated across 27 grazing allotments and 1 herd management area (HMA). Some allotments and HMAs have several springs and/or developed water sources while others may have only one water source. All water sources within the ON Line Project would be avoided whenever possible, as there is some flexibility in locating the actual structures and temporary work areas, thus reducing direct disturbances to existing water sources used by livestock or wild horses. Some grazing land that is permanently occupied by project facilities would be removed from localized grazing use for the long-term. Temporary construction areas could restrict grazing during construction but would be restored to grazing use through reclamation activities after construction. The level of project impacts to any one allotment or HMA depends upon the surface disturbance within each allotment or HMA. Impacts to range resources would be negligible.

Cultural Resources

Cultural resource sites eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) are present within the project area. All such sites would be avoided through project design to the extent possible. Impacts that could not be avoided would be lessened through project design and mitigated through data recovery according to a treatment plan approved by the BLM archaeologist and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. Impacts to cultural resources would be negligible to minor.

Native American Concerns

Native American concerns, including potential impacts to places of cultural or geographic interest to the Tribes, would be expected to be negligible because any adverse impacts to these resources would be addressed through consultation. Various Tribes have been consulted or informed of the proposed project components, and no specific concerns have been raised to date by these various Tribes regarding any religious site, sacred site, or traditional cultural property.

Land Use and Realty

Construction, operation, and maintenance of the ON Line Project would largely occur within the SWIP Utility Corridor already designated for this land use. Other project-related features such as the Robinson Summit Substation and portions of the transmission and telecommunication facilities that deviate from the SWIP Utility Corridor would be built according to authorizations issued by the BLM. These changes would be in keeping with the applicable BLM Resource Management Plan (RMP) and local land use plans.

Special Designation Areas

Three special designation areas (SDAs) would be within and four would be immediately adjacent to components of the ON Line Project. These areas may experience minor impacts from noise and dust and viewshed intrusions during construction or operation of project components.

Recreation

Dispersed recreation on public lands dominates recreation in the rural areas around the project area. The 2004 Nevada State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) identified the desire to protect, maintain, and increase public access to public lands as the top recreation management priority for the State of Nevada. Neither the Proposed Action nor Action Alternative would conflict with existing BLM RMPs across the project area. Management objectives related to recreation would remain viable and implementable. There are very few developed recreation facilities in the project area. The ON Line Project would cross or approach a number of designated recreation areas, including the Kirch Wildlife Management Area, Pahrangat National Wildlife Refuge, and Desert National Wildlife Refuge. However, access to these areas should be unaffected by construction activities.

Visual

All of the components of the Proposed Action would meet management objectives for visual resources when viewed from the Key Observation Points (KOPs). The Segment 10 (alternative component) alignment of the Action Alternative, which crosses a VRM Class II designation area, would not meet management objectives because of the adjacent visually sensitive wilderness area.

Noise

Maximum construction noise impacts would be 50 dBA within 1 mile and 45 dBA at 1.5 miles with the earth moving and construction equipment anticipated to be used. When helicopters are used occasionally, their noise levels could briefly reach up to 61 dBA within 1.5 miles. Construction noise impacts would be temporary and of short duration at any given location. Noise impacts to the nearest residential locations during construction and operation of the ON Line Project would be temporary and minor.

Socioeconomics

Construction and operation of the ON Line Project would result in economic benefits for both White Pine and Lincoln counties. Wages and employment would temporarily increase in the area, and both counties would experience a major, but temporary increase in sales tax revenue during the construction phase. The impact on property tax revenue in both counties would be

long-term but minor. The construction phase of the ON Line Project may create a short-term, temporary, and minor population increase in the area.

Environmental Justice

Minority populations of Native Americans occur in Nye and White Pine counties and a large population of persons living at or below the poverty level occur in Lincoln County. No populations living at or below the poverty level are concentrated in any geographically identifiable area, and minority populations would not experience any disproportionate adverse effects from the project, during construction or operations. Overall, there would be negligible disproportionate impacts on minority or low-income households from construction of the ON Line Project.

Hazardous Materials and Solid Waste

Hazardous materials would be used during construction of the ON Line Project. The largest quantities of these materials would be diesel fuel, gasoline, and propane for on-site vehicles. Compressed gas cylinders would be used for welding, cutting, and other metal work during construction. All of these materials would be stored and used in compliance with federal and state regulations, including spill controls for storage areas.

Solid wastes that would be generated and managed during construction of the project would include construction debris, office waste, workforce sewage, and small amounts of chemical waste from paints, cements etc. All solid wastes produced in the construction and operation of the project would be disposed of in existing, permitted waste disposal facilities in the general vicinity. Utilizing best management practices for handling these wastes would result in negligible environmental impacts.

Transportation

Construction of the ON Line Project would result in an influx of construction workers, which would add to the Average Annual Daily Traffic (AADT) on US-93. However, this increase would not change the Level of Service (LOS) rating (traffic flow) of the highway (HDR et al. 2007). Impacts to transportation during construction would be temporary and minor. Impacts to transportation during operation and maintenance would be long-term and negligible.

COMPARISON SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION & ACTION ALTERNATIVE

IMPACT	PROPOSED ACTION (INCLUDES ROBINSON SUMMIT AND FALCON SUBSTATIONS, AND SEGMENTS 6C, 8, 9A, 9B, 9D, AND 11)	ACTION ALTERNATIVE (INCLUDES ROBINSON SUMMIT AND FALCON SUBSTATIONS, AND SEGMENTS 6C, 8, 9B, 9C, 9D, AND 11)	
Water Resources			
Acreage of wetlands impacts	ST	0	Same as Proposed Action
	LT	0	Same as Proposed Action
Number of perennial streams spanned	2	Same as Proposed Action	
Geology and Minerals			
Potential effects on topography	Minor	Same as Proposed Action	
Number of mining, oil, gas, and/or geothermal claims potentially impacted	0	Same as Proposed Action	
Paleontological Resources			
Potential to encounter paleontological resources	Low to High, depending on area Robinson Summit Substation has high potential	Same as Proposed Action	
Soils			
Acreage Temporarily Disturbed	6,550	6,435	
Acreage Permanently Disturbed	789	770	
Air Quality			
Would NAAQS be exceeded?	No	No	
Vegetation			
Five vegetation types with the most acreage permanently impacted, plus winterfat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creosote– 144 • Douglas rabbitbrush - 13 • Joshua Tree - 10 • Pinyon-juniper - 17 • Wyoming sagebrush - 26 • Winterfat - 7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creosote – 152 • Douglas rabbitbrush - 12 • Joshua Tree - 10 • Pinion-juniper – 18 • Wyoming sagebrush – 26 • Winterfat – 6 	
Noxious and non-native, invasive weed risk assessment	Low to moderate, depending on area Areas of moderate risk: Robinson Summit Substation, Segment 11	Same as Proposed Action	
Special-status plant species observation locations that could be impacted	Segments 6C and 9B	Segments 6C, 9B, and 9C	
Wildlife Resources, Including Special Status Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquatic Species			
Number of potentially occupied greater sage-grouse leks within 2 miles (includes active, inactive, and unknown leks)	6	7	
Pygmy rabbit observation locations that could be impacted	Segment 6C	Same as Proposed Action	
Areas of pronghorn antelope range impacted	Segments 6C, 8, and 9C, excluding higher elevations	Same as Proposed Action	
Impacts to fisheries and aquatic resources	None to negligible	Same as Proposed Action	
Acres of desert tortoise habitat permanently impacted	430 acres	428 acres	
Areas of mule deer crucial winter range impacts	Portions of Segments 6C and 8	Same as Proposed Action	
Raptor nesting areas within 2 miles	Ferruginous hawk: Segment 6C and nest observations along Segment 8	Same as Proposed Action	

IMPACT	PROPOSED ACTION (INCLUDES ROBINSON SUMMIT AND FALCON SUBSTATIONS, AND SEGMENTS 6C, 8, 9A, 9B, 9D, AND 11)		ACTION ALTERNATIVE (INCLUDES ROBINSON SUMMIT AND FALCON SUBSTATIONS, AND SEGMENTS 6C, 8, 9B, 9C, 9D, AND 11)
Range Resources			
Number of allotments Impacted	27		Same as Proposed Action
Number of Herd Management Areas (HMAs) Impacted	1		Same as Proposed Action
Cultural Resources			
Number of or Projected Acres of NRHP-Eligible Sites impacted	3 sites + 204 acres		3 sites + 198 acres
Native American Concerns			
Impacts to Places of Cultural and/or Geographic Interest to Tribes potentially impacted	5		4
Land Use			
Acres of BLM lands affected by the project	5,789		5,790
Acres of private, state, or other agency lands affected by the project	38		13
Special Designation Areas (SDAs)			
Number of SDAs with project components within their boundary	3		Same as Proposed Action
Recreation			
Overall impact to recreation	Short-term, negligible to major Long-term, negligible to minor		Same as Proposed Action
Visual Resources			
Developments potentially not consistent with BLM Visual Resource Management Classification designation	None		Same as Proposed Action
Noise			
Noise impacts to nearest residence	ST	Minor	Same as Proposed Action
	LT	Negligible	Same as Proposed Action
Socioeconomics			
Peak fiscal impact to local government	ST	Sales Tax Revenue - Major	Same as Proposed Action
	LT	Property Tax Revenue - Minor	Same as Proposed Action
Employment	ST	Moderate	Same as Proposed Action
	LT	None	Same as Proposed Action
Environmental Justice			
Disproportionate effects to minority or low income populations	Negligible		Same as Proposed Action
Hazardous Materials and Solid Waste			
Anticipated environmental effects from use of hazardous materials	Negligible		Same as Proposed Action
Transportation			
Impacts to transportation	ST	Minor to moderate	Same as Proposed Action
	LT	Negligible	Same as Proposed Action