United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Wyoming State Office
P.O. Box 1828
Cheyenne, Wyoming 82003-1828

In Reply Refer To:
2800 (920George)
WYW-174598
IDI-35849
Gateway West Transmission Line

MAR 19 2013

Dear Reader:

Attached for your review and comment is the Final Environmental Impact Statement (Final EIS) for the Proposed Gateway West Transmission Line Project and proposed land use plan amendments for several Bureau of Land Management (BLM) planning areas and U. S. Forest Service (USFS) National Forest units.

General Information

The BLM prepared this Final EIS in consultation with cooperating agencies and in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended; the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), Department of Agriculture, and Department of the Interior (DOI) regulations implementing NEPA (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508 for the CEQ, 36 CFR Part 220 for the Forest Service, and 43 CFR Part 46 for the BLM) to analyze the effects of authorizing the Proponents (Rocky Mountain Power and Idaho Power) to construct and operate the Gateway West Transmission Line Project. The Proponents submitted applications for Right-of-Way (ROW) grants to utilize portions of the National System of Public Lands and special use permits to utilize portions of National Forest System Lands in southern Wyoming and southern Idaho. Other Federal authorizations are listed in Table 1.4-1. The BLM Wyoming State Office is the lead BLM office for this project.

The Proponents are requesting the BLM ROW grants and Forest Service special use permits for the construction and operation of approximately 990 miles of new 230-kilovolt (kV), 345-kV, and 500-kV electric transmission system consisting of 10 segments between the Windstar Substation at Glenrock, Wyoming, and the Hemingway Substation approximately 30 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The proposed transmission line would supplement existing transmission lines and relieve operating limitations, increase capacity, and improve reliability in the existing electric transmission grid. This would allow for the delivery of up to 1,500 megawatts of additional energy for the Proponents' larger service areas, principally in Utah and Idaho, and to other interconnected systems. The Project includes three proposed substations and expansions or modifications at nine existing substations. Other associated facilities include communication systems, optical fiber regeneration stations, and substation distribution supply lines.

The Final EIS responds to comments received on the Draft EIS, corrects and adds information obtained after preparation of the Draft EIS, and identifies the BLM preferred routes for the project. This Final EIS is a full reprint of the analysis presented in the Draft EIS and as such it assesses the environmental impacts of the Proposed Action, Route Alternatives, and includes an analysis of the No Action Alternative.

Changes Between the Draft and Final EISs

Important additions and changes to note between the Draft and Final EISs are:

- Identification of the BLM Preferred Routes,
- Proponents modification of the proposal, specifically:
    - Adjustments to the construction time line,
    - Dropping Segment 1E (a second new 230-kV line between Glenrock, Wyoming and Aeolus)
    - Revising the Proposed Route in Segment 1W(a) near Glenrock, Wyoming in response to comments from the Governor of Wyoming, the City of Glenrock, and members of the public,
    - Dropping the second circuit originally proposed for Segments 2, 3, and 4 (Aeolus to Populas). A single 500-kV circuit is now proposed. This reduces the ROW width from 300 to 250 feet,
    - Eliminating the proposed Creston and Bridger Substations,
    - Revising the Proposed route in Segment 2 to conform to the Wyoming Governor's Sage-grouse Executive Order,
    - Revising the Proposed route in Segment 4 to the Alternative 4A alignment to conform to the Wyoming Governor's Sage-grouse Executive Order, and
    - Revising Segment 9 to avoid crossing the "Wild" portion of the Salmon Falls Creek Eligible Wild and Scenic River,
    - Details on other proposal modifications are located in Section 1.1.1.
- Modification of Cassia, Power, and Twin Falls County's preferred alternative in Segment 7. The revised alternative is identified as 7K. Alternatives 7H, 7I, and 7J were not carried forward into the Final EIS. This eliminated any routes in Nevada,
- Modifications to Alternatives 9D/G in the vicinity of the Cove Non-motorized Area,
- Modifications to Alternative 9E to avoid preliminary priority sage-grouse habitat,
- An updated Plan of Development, located in Appendix B,
- Updated Proponent submitted Mitigation Plans in Appendix C,
- Updated sage-grouse analysis in Appendix J,
- An agricultural economics analysis in Appendix K,
- The BLM response to comments on the Draft EIS in Appendix L,
- A Biological Assessment of Threatened and Endangered Species, required by the Endangered Species Act, in Appendix M,
- A Draft Programmatic Agreement, required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, in Appendix N, and
- BLM Proposed Land Use Plan Amendments associated with the agency preferred routes. These Proposed Plan Amendments may be protested, as discussed below.

The BLM Decision on the Right-of-Way Application

The BLM will decide whether to grant, grant with modifications, or deny the Proposed Action, an Action Alternative, or any portion of a proposed route or alternative with independent utility. The BLM's decision will be documented in a Record of Decision (ROD), issued before the ROW Grant is approved.

Analysis in the Final EIS covers the entire project, disclosing all Project-wide effects. The BLM is considering several factors, including (1) the proposed construction schedule (Table 2.1-3), (2) other authorizing entities' preferred routes, (3) environmental effects of the analyzed routes, and (4) opportunities to reach complementary siting decision with other authorizing entities when making a decision on whether or not to authorize the project on public land and if all or only a portion of the project should be authorized at this time.

If BLM chooses to issue a ROW Grant for only a portion of the project, that decision will not preclude the BLM's ability to choose the "No Action" alternative for the remainder of the project. The BLM may take this approach only if the phase(s) approved cover portion(s) of the project that, if constructed, could be operated without waiting for other phases to be approved.

A phased decision could provide the various Federal, State, and local permitting agencies to potentially reach consensus regarding the siting of the route for one or more segments. In a phased decision process, the BLM would issue a ROW Grant for certain segments with independent utility. The ROD would provide the rationale for a phased decision. The start of construction for the authorized route for the first phase decision area would be approved by a Notice to Proceed when all grant and other regulatory requirements are met.

For the remaining segments of the proposal, the BLM would initiate siting discussions with cooperating agencies and stakeholders. At the conclusion of those discussions, the BLM would determine the adequacy of the environmental analysis in the Final EIS and grant, grant with modifications, or deny the remaining portions of the proposal. These additional discussions with stakeholders may lead to new information and/or modifications to the alternatives for the remaining portion(s) of the proposal, which may require additional environmental analysis. Only the remaining portion(s) of the project would be addressed in such an analysis in accordance with the CEQ NEPA regulations and DOI policy. The public would be offered the opportunity to review and comment on any additional analysis.

Protests of any land use plan amendments included in the second phase decision area would be allowed as provided in 43 CFR 1610.5-2 during the review period for the supplemental material. The opportunity to appeal the BLM decision covering the second phase area would be allowed as provided in 43 CFR Parts 4 and 2801.10.

The BLM is seeking public comments about a phased decision process as part of the Final EIS review.

Submitting Comments on the Final EIS

The Final EIS is not a decision document. Rather, its purpose is to reflect changes to the analysis resulting from public comment and new information, inform the public and interested parties of impacts associated with implementing the proponent's proposal by granting Right-of-Way to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission transmission facilities across Federal lands, and in some cases amending underlying land management plans. This Final EIS also provides information to other regulatory agencies for use in their decision making process for other permits required to implement this project.

The BLM will host public meetings to discuss the Final EIS. Dates, times, and locations of these meetings will be distributed in newsletters, announced in the local news media, and posted on the project website at http://www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/cfodocs/gateway_west.

The comment period for the Proposed Gateway West Transmission Line Project Final EIS will close 60 days following the date the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. The BLM can best use your comments and information if received within the review period. You may submit written comments on the Final EIS by hand delivery, U.S. postal mail, or electronic mail. You may also submit comments electronically at www.gatewaywesteis.com. Comments will also be accepted at the public meetings.

Written comments may be hand delivered to any of the following BLM offices during normal business hours:

Idaho State Office
Boise District Office
Owyhee Field Office
Twin Falls District Office
Burley Field Office
Shoshone Field Office
Idaho Falls District Office
Pocatello Field Office

Wyoming State Office
Casper Field Office
Rawlins Field Office
Rock Springs Field Office
Kemmerer Field Office

Comments submitted by U.S. postal mail can be sent to:

Project Manager
Gateway West Transmission Line Project EIS
Bureau of Land Management
P.O. Box 20879
Cheyenne, WY 82003

Electronic comments must be submitted to Gateway_West_WYMail@blm.gov. Please include "Gateway West Transmission Line Project" in the subject line of the comments. Emails submitted to email addresses other than the one listed or containing viruses will be rejected.

To be most helpful, comments on the Final EIS should be as specific as possible, mentioning particular pages, sections, or chapters. All comments will be reviewed. Substantive comments are the most helpful. For a comment to be substantive, it should:

- Provide new information pertaining to the Proposed Action, an alternative, or the analysis;
- Point out a specific flaw in the analysis;
- Suggest alternate methodologies that should be used, including reasons why;
- Make factual corrections, or
- Identify a different source of credible research, which, if used in the analysis, could result in different effects.

Land Use Plan Amendments and the BLM Protest Process

The BLM has identified 18 Proposed Plan Amendments located in seven planning areas that are needed for the preferred routes to conform to the approved plan. Details on each Proposed Plan Amendment can be found in Section 2.2.4 and Appendix F of this Final EIS.

Pursuant to BLM's planning regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-2, any person who participated in the plan amendment process for this project and has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the planning decisions may protest approval of the planning decisions within 30 days from date the EPA publishes the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. For further information on filing a protest, please see the accompanying protest regulations on the page that follows (labeled as Attachment 1). The regulations specify the required elements of your protest. Take care to document all relevant facts. As much as possible, reference or cite the planning documents or available planning records (e.g. meeting minutes or summaries, correspondence, etc.).

Emailed and faxed protests will not be accepted as valid protests unless the protesting party also provides the original letter by either regular or overnight mail postmarked by the close of the protest period. Under these conditions, the BLM will consider the emailed or faxed protest as an advance copy and will afford it full consideration. If you wish to provide the BLM with such advance notification, please direct faxed protests to the attention of Brenda Hudgens-Williams, BLM protest coordinator, at 202-245-0028, and emailed protests to: Brenda_Hudgens-Williams@blm.gov.

All protests, including the follow-up letter to emails or faxes, must be in writing and mailed to one of the following addresses:

Regular Mail:
Director (210)
Attn: Brenda Williams
P.O. Box 71383
Washington, D.C. 20024-1383

Overnight Mail:
Director (210)
Attn: Brenda Williams
20 M Street SE, Room 2134LM
Washington, D.C. 20003

The BLM Director will make every attempt to promptly render a decision on each protest. The decision will be in writing and will be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested. The decision of the BLM Director shall be the final decision of the Department of the Interior on each protest. Responses to protest issues will be compiled and formalized in a Director's Protest Resolution Report made available following issuance of the decisions.

The BLM Decision and Appeal Processes

Upon resolution of all land use plan protests, the BLM will issue a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD will be available electronically to all who participated in the environmental analysis and planning process or by mail upon request.

Unlike land use planning decisions, implementation decisions (i.e., granting a ROW) are not subject to protest under the BLM planning regulations, but are subject to an administrative review process following the issuance of the ROD. Appeals are filed with the Office of Hearings and Appeals, Interior Board of Land Appeals pursuant to 43 CFR, Part 4 Subpart E. Implementation decisions generally constitute the BLM's final approval allowing on-the-ground actions to proceed. They are in full force and effect when the ROD is issued. The BLM ROD will contain the appropriate instructions for filing an appeal.

It is the BLM's practice to make comments and protests, including names and addresses of submitters, available for public review. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information with your comments or protest, be advised that your entire comment or protest, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. Although you may ask us in your submission to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

The Forest Service Decision and Appeal Process

Following the FEIS comment period, USFS will issue a separate Record of Decision (ROD) for activities under their respective jurisdiction. Copies of that ROD will be mailed to people and entities on the Gateway West project mailing list. Notice of this decision will be published in local newspapers and the respective Papers of Record. The ROD will have an appeal period before the decision becomes effective. The Forest Service ROD will contain the appropriate instructions for appeal.

For additional information, contact Walt George, Project Manager, BLM Wyoming State Office, at 307-775-6116, or visit the website at: http://www.wy.blm.gov/nepa/cfodocs/gateway_west.

Thank you for your interest and participation in this analysis.

Sincerely,

Donald A. Simpson
State Director, Wyoming

Attachment 1

Regulations for Filing a Valid Protest

[Code of Federal Regulations]
[Title 43, Volume 2]
[Revised as of October 1, 2002]
From the U.S. Government Printing Office via GPO Access
[CITE: 43CFR1610.5-2]

[Page 20]
TITLE 43--PUBLIC LANDS: INTERIOR
CHAPTER II--BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PART 1600--PLANNING, PROGRAMMING, BUDGETING--Table of Contents
Subpart 1610--Resource Management Planning
Sec. 1610.5-2--Protest procedures.

(a) Any person who participated in the planning process and has an interest which is or may be adversely affected by the approval or amendment of a resource management plan may protest such approval or amendment. A protest may raise only those issues which were submitted for the record during the planning process.

(1) The protest shall be in writing and shall be filed with the Director. The protest shall be filed within 30 days of the date the Environmental Protection Agency published the notice of receipt of the final environmental impact statement containing the plan or amendment in the Federal Register. For an amendment not requiring the preparation of an environmental impact statement, the protest shall be filed within 30 days of the publication of the notice of its effective date.

(2) The protest shall contain:

(i) The name, mailing address, telephone number and interest of the person filing the protest;
(ii) A statement of the issue or issues being protested;
(iii) A statement of the part or parts of the plan or amendment being protested;
(iv) A copy of all documents addressing the issue or issues that were submitted during the planning process by the protesting party or an indication of the date the issue or issues were discussed for the record; and
(v) A concise statement explaining why the State Director's decision is believed to be wrong.

(3) The Director shall promptly render a decision on the protest. The decision shall be in writing and shall set forth the reasons for the decision. The decision shall be sent to the protesting party by certified mail, return receipt requested.

(b) The decision of the Director shall be the final decision of the Department of the Interior.