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Western Area Power Administration  
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region  
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Loveland, CO 80539-3003

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION  
ROCKY MOUNTAIN CUSTOMER SERVICE REGION**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND  
FLOODPLAINS STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

**LOVELL-YELLOWTAIL AND BASIN-LOVELL TRANSMISSION  
LINES UPGRADE, BIG HORN COUNTY, WYOMING,  
AND BIG HORN AND CARBON COUNTIES, MONTANA**

**DOE/EA-1617**

**AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), Western Area Power  
Administration (Western)**

**ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) and Floodplains Statement of  
Findings**

**SUMMARY:** This FONSI and Floodplain Statement of Findings was prepared in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), 40 CFR § 1508.13; DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures, 10 CFR § 1021.322; and DOE Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements, 10 CFR § 1021 and 1022. This FONSI addresses Western's proposal to upgrade the Lovell-Yellowtail (LV-YT) No. 1 and No. 2 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission lines and the Basin-Lovell (BA-LV) 115-kV transmission line. The FONSI summarizes the information Western used to determine that the proposal would not have a significant impact on the human environment, and would not require preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS). Western was the lead Federal agency, and the National Park Service (NPS) and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) were cooperating agencies on the environmental assessment (EA). The EA evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposal and alternatives, and identifies actions to minimize impacts. Western prepared a Mitigation Action Plan, which is available on the project website at the address below. Western incorporates the information in the EA into this FONSI and Floodplains Statement of Findings.

**Project Description:** Western proposes to rebuild the LV-YT No. 1 and No. 2 115-kV transmission lines located in Big Horn County, Wyoming, and in Big Horn and Carbon Counties, Montana, and the BA-LV 115-kV transmission line in Big Horn County, Wyoming. The LV-YT No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines parallel each other and are approximately 47 miles long with termination points at the Yellowtail Substation near Fort Smith, Montana, and the Lovell Substation near Lovell, Wyoming. The BA-LV transmission line is approximately 39 miles long with termination points at the Basin Substation near Basin, Wyoming, and the Lovell Substation. The Nahne Jensen Substation, another facility involved in the BA-LV upgrade, connects to the BA-LV transmission line near Greybull, Wyoming. The transmission lines would be upgraded with a larger conductor and would continue to operate at 115 kV. The existing right-of-ways would be sufficient for the proposed Project. Additional information on the proposed action, no action, and other alternatives is in Chapter 2 of the EA. Information on transmission line structures, conductors, access roads, and other actions is in Chapter 2 of the EA.

After construction of the portion of the project located on NPS-managed lands, the NPS would reclaim redundant and abandoned access roads within the Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area. NPS would monitor revegetation to ensure it is successful.

Access roads that Western would continue to use would be repaired, if needed, to ensure effective erosion control and access for routine maintenance over the life of the lines. Improvements to existing roads and some new spur or access roads to some structure sites may be required. Roads that would only be used for construction would be reseeded when construction is finished.

Electrical substation equipment at the Yellowtail, Lovell, Basin, and Nahne Jensen Substations, including breakers; disconnect switches; instrument transformers; and buswork and jumpers; would be replaced or upgraded, as needed. Substation work would not require expansion.

Under the No Action Alternative, Western would continue to operate and maintain the transmission lines as they have before. This alternative would not meet the purpose and need of increasing system reliability, which allows for improved flexibility for system operation, or improving the safety and maintainability of the transmission lines.

**Public Involvement:** Western notified stakeholders of the project and solicited their concerns through scoping letters dated May 22, 2008. Western sent notices on May 23, 2008, to interested parties and stakeholders to announce public meetings. Public meetings were held on July 8, 2008, in Billings, Montana; July 9, 2008, in Crow Agency, Montana; and July 10, 2008, in Lovell, Wyoming. Public comments were accepted anytime through the environmental review period.

On May 14, 2010, Western sent a letter to project stakeholders (landowners, state and local governments, and tribes) to notify them of changes to the project that included the

proposal to rebuild and upgrade the BA-LV transmission line. Western identified the need for the upgrade through additional technical studies.

Western announced that the draft EA was available for public review on July 29, 2011. Western mailed notices to approximately 140 landowners, agencies, tribes, and other stakeholders. The EA was posted on Western's Web site, and a hard copy or CD was sent to those who requested them. The comment period was open from July 29, 2011, through August 22, 2011. Comments could be sent by e-mail or regular mail. Comments were received from MDEQ, U.S. Department of the Army, Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wyoming and Montana offices.

The EA was revised to address the comments, and copies of the correspondence are in the Appendix to the EA. This FONSI and the Mitigation Action Plan (MAP), discussed below, are posted on Western's Web site at the address given below.

**Environmental Consequences and Mitigation:** Western's conclusions on the Project's environmental impacts are based on information contained in the EA. The EA is incorporated by reference. A summary of the impact discussion is in the EA Summary.

Chapter 3, Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences, contains a summary of the resources that may be affected by the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Resources issues and impact topics evaluated in Chapter 3 include:

- Air Quality
- Geology
- Paleontology
- Water Resources and Floodplains
- Wetlands and other Waters of the United States
- Upland Vegetation
- Soils
- Wildlife
- Threatened, Endangered, and Other Special Status Species
- Cultural Resources and Historic Properties
- Land Use
- Visual Resources
- Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice
- Transportation
- Public Health and Safety

Detailed discussions of the impact analyses for affected resources in the study area are presented in Sections 3.2 through 3.16. Impacts of the Proposed Action, other Action Alternatives, and the No Action alternative are compared in these sections. Based on the analysis of the impacts, adoption of identified measures that would reduce impacts, and use of Western's standard practices described in Chapter 2, no significant environmental impacts were identified. Western prepared a Mitigation Action Plan to address site-

specific measures that would be implemented during construction or operation to control environmental impacts.

Western and NPS prepared an agreement that describes the requirements for protecting natural resources and undertaking other actions in the Big Horn National Recreation Area. Western, with assistance from the NPS as described in the agreement, will implement the measures.

For compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Western will continue to consult with and coordinate with the NPS Bighorn Canyon National Recreation Area, the Crow Nation, the Bureau of Land Management Billings Field Office, the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Wyoming SHPO, the Bureau of Reclamation Montana Area Office, and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Western will continue consultation with the Northern Cheyenne, the Eastern Shoshone, and the Northern Arapaho. For sites potentially affected by each phase of construction, Western will prepare site treatment plans, and memorandums of agreement in coordination with the appropriate land managing agency, the Crow Nation and the Montana and Wyoming SHPOs. The coordination and consultation will continue through the end of each phase of construction. Commitments identified in the site treatment plans and memorandums of agreement will mitigate effects to historic properties within the area of potential effect.

**Cumulative Impacts:** No significant cumulative impacts were identified for Western's proposal.

## **FLOODPLAINS STATEMENT OF FINDINGS**

The EA contains information that comprises the floodplain assessment required by DOE Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements (Requirements). Using the latest authoritative information available, Western determined that some construction and maintenance actions would occur within 100-year floodplains. These actions would include removing and replacing transmission line structures, which are considered "facilities" for the purposes of the DOE Requirements; replacing or adding culverts to improve access to the transmission lines; and traveling across floodplains during construction and maintenance. Western notified appropriate Federal, state, and local agencies with jurisdiction over floodplains. Copies of correspondence between Western and the agencies responsible for floodplain protection are in the EA.

The maps of the floodplains and description of the proposed action and alternatives related to them are in Chapter 3 of the EA. They are incorporated by reference into the findings. The actions would conform to the applicable floodplain protection standards. Alternatives considered relative to floodplains included locations of the transmission line support structures and capacities of culverts on access ways in floodplains. Transmission line routing alternatives were not considered since floodplain crossings could not be avoided economically through routing, and the alternatives would increase the environmental impacts of the project. The transmission line crossings of the floodplains

have been in place for many years with no significant adverse effects on the floodplains, transmission lines, or adjacent uses. Western would minimize potential harm to or within floodplains through the standard construction practices listed in Chapter 2 of the EA and other mitigating actions described in Chapter 3. These include minimizing the amount of grading in floodplains, appropriate design and placement of culverts, locating transmission line structures to minimize floodplains impacts, and appropriate design of structures and incorporating the requirements of the Nationwide Permit for utility crossings. There would be no effects of national or regional concern associated with Western's proposal.

**COPIES OF THE FINAL EA ARE AVAILABLE FROM:**

Mr. Jim Hartman, A7400  
Natural Resources Office  
Western Area Power Administration  
12155 West Alameda Parkway  
P.O. Box 281213  
Lakewood, CO 80228  
LovellYellowtailEA@wapa.gov

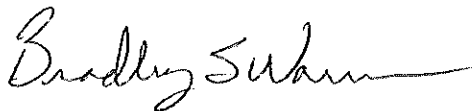
The EA, FONSI and MAP can be downloaded from Western's website at:  
<http://ww2.wapa.gov/sites/western/transmission/infrastruct/Pages/Lovell-YellowtailEA.aspx>

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON THE DOE NEPA PROCESS CONTACT:**

Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance  
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, DC 20585  
202-586-4600 or 1-800-472-2756

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the information presented in the EA, including implementing the described protective measures, Western determined that its proposal to rebuild and upgrade the LV-YT No. 1 and No. 2 transmission lines and the BA-LV transmission line does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of the NEPA. Therefore, an EIS is not required, and Western is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Loveland, Colorado on 9-23, 2011.



Bradley Warren  
Regional Manager