

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Western Area Power Administration

Fort Collins 115-kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project, Fort Collins, Colorado.

AGENCY: Western Area Power Administration, DOE

ACTION: Finding of no significant impact

SUMMARY: The Department of Energy (DOE), Western Area Power Administration (Western) is the lead federal agency for a proposed project to upgrade the electric transmission system in the Fort Collins, Colorado area. Platte River Power Authority (Platte River) is proposing to add additional generation at its Rawhide Power Plant, to rebuild and upgrade segments of Western's existing Flatiron-Poudre and Poudre-Richard's Lake 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, and to install additional 230 kV transmission to Platte River's existing electrical system.

Western prepared an environmental assessment (EA) titled "Fort Collins 115kV Transmission Line Upgrade Project" (DOE/EA-1354). The EA contains an analysis of the proposed activities. The EA is summarized in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) under "SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION".

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Additional information and copies of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public from the person named above. For general information on DOE National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) activities contact:

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#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Western prepared an EA for the proposed project, in compliance with NEPA, and regulations promulgated by the Council on Environmental Quality for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR 1500-1508) and the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures found at 10 CFR 1021.

Western and Platte River need to upgrade and rebuild portions of the transmission lines in Fort Collins, Colorado area. The purpose of this upgrade is to improve reliability of the electric system in the area, and to deliver additional power generation from the Rawhide Energy Station.

As part of the public scoping process for the project, public workshops were held on February 1, 2001 and February 15, 2001. In addition, all potentially affected landowners adjacent to the existing transmission line rights-of-way were notified of the public workshops. A draft EA was distributed to the public and interested agencies on June 27, 2001 for review and comment. The comment period ended July 17, 2001. Minor comments were received from the City of Fort Collins, which were addressed and incorporated into the EA.

Alternatives considered in the EA include the No-Action Alternative and the proposed action. Alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed analysis included conservation of energy alternatives, electric system alternatives, structure type alternatives and design alternatives.

Under the No-Action Alternative, no upgrades or rebuilds to the existing transmission line system would be constructed in the Fort Collins area, and only essential maintenance activities would be performed. Repairs would be required with increasing frequency in the future as the

transmission lines increase in age. If the no action alternative were implemented, other actions would be required to improve the electric system that serves the Fort Collins area to provide reliable delivery of additional electric power. The other actions taken to improve the reliability of the electrical system in the Fort Collins area would have environmental effects.

The proposed action consists of the following: 1) Platte River would string a second 230-kV circuit on Platte River's existing double-circuit single-column steel pole structures between Rawhide Energy Station and the LaPorte Substation, 2) Platte River would convert one side of its existing double-circuit line from the LaPorte Substation to the LaPorte Tap line to 230kV operation, 3) Platte River proposes to rebuild and upgrade a 2 mile section of Western's existing Flatiron-Poudre 115-kV H-frame wood pole transmission line between the LaPorte Tap and Western's Poudre Substation to a double circuit transmission line with single-column steel poles. One circuit (Western's) would be constructed for 115kV operation and terminate at the Poudre Substation. The second circuit (Platte River's) would be designed and constructed for 230kV operation and would be connected at the LaPorte Tap, 4) Platte River would construct the second circuit on its existing double-circuit line between the Timberline and the Poudre substation and terminate the new 230kV line at the Timberline Substation, 5) Platte River would rebuild and upgrade Western's existing 115-kV H-frame wood pole transmission line between Western's Poudre Substation and Platte River's Richards Lake Substation as a double-circuit line using single-column steel poles designed for 230kV operation, but initially operated at 115kV.

Environmental resources were identified in the EA and evaluated for project impacts.

There would be no long-term effects on regional or local climate. There may be minor, local, short-term adverse effects to air quality due to the generation of fugitive dust and emission from construction vehicles during construction activities. Employing Standard Construction Practices will minimize fugitive dust and vehicle emissions. The proposed action will have no direct, indirect or cumulative effects on area physiography, topography or geology. Construction activities may cause temporary, short-term soil erosion in localized areas. The soils in the project

area have been previously disturbed by installation of the existing transmission line without significant adverse effects. The project is not expected to have significant adverse effects on prime and important farmlands. There will be no significant impacts related to soils. Surface water occurrence or flow would not be impacted. Minor, localized, and short-term adverse effects to water quality may occur during the construction activities. Standard Construction Practices will minimize potential adverse impacts to water quality. The transmission lines will span flood plains and riparian areas. No impacts to surface water channel or stock ponds are anticipated. A Floodplain/wetlands Assessment was prepared and is included in the EA. The project will not cause adverse impacts to floodplain or riparian areas. The project will not affect groundwater resources.

Short-term effects to vegetation would occur with the loss of cover and biomass as vegetation is disturbed at pull-sites and equipment staging areas. Potential invasion of weedy plants, and displacement of native plants, may occur due to soil disturbances in the existing right-of-way between the LaPorte Tap and the Richards Lake Tap. Establishment of weedy species will be minimized by the use of the Larimer County recommended practices for weed control and the Standard Construction Practices. The project would not cause any impact to wetlands. In the Springer Natural Area, all individuals of the American black current shrubs would be marked and avoided. The project would have no effect on any plant species of concern, including the Ute ladies'-tresses orchid and the Colorado butterfly plant.

Effects on wildlife and wildlife habitat from the construction and operation of the project would be short-term and temporary. No data indicate that the existing transmission lines have caused either collision or electrocution of birds in the project area. The proposed action would not change the potential for avian collisions compared to the existing transmission lines. The transmission line configuration for the proposed action meets and exceeds design recommendations minimizing electrocutions for all raptor species. There is no potential for direct effects to fish habitat or populations. Implementation of the Standard Construction Practices will eliminate the potential for indirect impacts to fish habitats or populations.

The EA includes a Biological Assessment that addresses seven federally listed, proposed and candidate species of plants and animals potentially occurring in the project area. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurred on September 12, 2001 with Western's determination that the project will have "no effect" on the black-footed ferret, black-tailed prairie dog, Ute ladies'-tresses orchid and the Colorado butterfly plant; and, that the project is "not likely to adversely affect" the bald eagle, mountain plover and Preble's meadow jumping mouse. Specific to the Preble's mouse, mouse habitat will be avoided by project activities with the exception of minimal shrub trimming in Preble's mouse habitat and pole replacement activities (estimated 2 poles) in upland areas. Pole replacement in upland Preble's mouse habitats will occur when the mouse is inactive (November 1 through April 30). Additional new disturbances (i.e. pull sites, new access roads) within Preble's mouse habitat will require further consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Specific to the mountain plover, surveys will be conducted in areas of suitable mountain plover habitat and, if mountain plover are located, project activities will avoid occupied areas from April 1 through July 31.

The proposed action will not impact land ownership, zoning, or land use. There will be no long-term adverse effects to cropland. Potential temporary, short-term effects to residential land uses during construction activities for the project will be increases in noise, dust, traffic and the intrusion of equipment and construction crews onto private property during construction activities. There will be no impacts within Larimer County designated open space areas. Temporary, short-term effects to roadways are anticipated to occur from construction related activities. Effects to the visual resources from the construction and operation of the proposed action are not expected to be significantly different from those associated with the existing transmission lines.

The proposed action will not cause significant effects to the socioeconomic resources of Larimer County. No permanent increase in population or workforce, employment or income, housing, or community service demands will be required. Minimal additional tax revenues would be generated by the project.

Potential electrical effects from transmission lines include fire hazards, generation of electric and magnetic fields, safety concerns, and corona effects. The proposed action's associated electric and magnetic fields are not anticipated to cause adverse health or biological effects. The proposed action will have comparable routine maintenance procedures as the existing transmission lines and the risk of fire will be minimal. The proposed action will meet or exceed all applicable requirements of the National Electrical Safety Code. The proposed action is not anticipated to have significant corona effects. Noise generated by the proposed action will not be perceptibly different from the noise generated by the existing transmission lines. Ozone generation from the proposed action would be undetectable.

Construction of the proposed action would not impact any significant archaeological or historic sites. At least six significant cultural resources were recorded within 500 feet of the centerline of the project's rights-of-way. In addition, ten potentially significant resources are on record but need further evaluation before this determination can be made. Potential significant resources noted consist of historic canals and ditches, and prehistoric aboriginal camps with stone circles. Avoidance of the properties during construction of the proposed action is possible and should prevent direct impacts. Requiring that all activities take place within the rights-of-way can minimize indirect impacts.

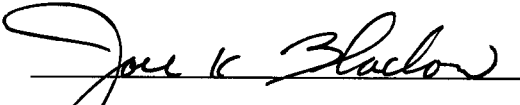
Western contacted potentially interested tribes (Northern Arapaho, Shoshone, Northern Cheyenne River Sioux, Rosebud Sioux, Pine Ridge Sioux, Devils Lake Sioux, Standing Rock Sioux, Turtle Mountain Chippewa, and the Three Affiliated Tribes) and requested information the tribes may have on traditional cultural properties or areas of concern that might be affected by the

project. No information was received from any of the tribes.

For compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106, Western consulted with the Colorado State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO). On July 25, 2001 the SHPO concurred with Western's determination that "no historic properties will be affected".

**DETERMINATION:** The analyses contained in the EA indicate that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of NEPA. Western has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required and is therefore, issuing this FONSI.

Issued at Loveland, Colorado September 25, 2001

  
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