

Palisades-Goshen Transmission Line Reconstruction Project

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

and Floodplain Statement of Findings

DOE/EA-1591

Summary

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings on the Palisades-Goshen Transmission Line Reconstruction Project. The project involves rebuilding the existing Palisades-Goshen 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line, which extends from Palisades Dam in eastern Idaho approximately 52 miles west to the Goshen Substation south of Idaho Falls, Idaho. BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-1591) evaluating the proposed project and its alternative. Based on the analysis in the EA, BPA has determined that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required, and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent.

The comments received on the Preliminary EA and responses to the comments are in the Revision Sheet for the EA. Minor changes to the Preliminary EA, due to comments and any refinements or changes in the project, are underlined (text additions) or struck through (deleted text).

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) that lists all the mitigation measures that BPA is committed to implementing. A Floodplain Statement of Findings is also included in this FONSI. Impacts to floodplains and wetlands will be avoided where possible and minimized where there is no practicable alternative.

Public Availability

This FONSI will be mailed directly to interested parties, a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties, and the FONSI will be posted on BPA's Web site.

Proposed Action

BPA is proposing to rebuild the existing Palisades-Goshen 115-kV transmission line, which extends from Palisades Dam in eastern Idaho approximately 52 miles west to Goshen Substation south of Idaho Falls, Idaho. In general, the Proposed Action would involve removing the line's existing wood H-frame structures and cross arms, and replacing them with new structures. Most of these new structures would be 230-kV wood structures, but 230-kV single-circuit and double-circuit steel structures would also be used at a few locations along the line.

In addition to rebuilding the line, the first approximately 2.5-mile portion of the line beginning at Palisades Dam would be relocated to a new right-of-way (ROW) roughly parallel to and about 600 feet southwest of the existing ROW. A similar length of BPA's existing Palisades-Swan

Valley 115-kV line, which is in the same existing ROW as the existing Palisades-Goshen line, would also be relocated to this new ROW. As a result of the relocation, four wood poles on the existing Bureau of Reclamation 12.5-kV distribution line near Palisades Dam would be relocated to avoid conflict with the relocated BPA lines.

Although the line would be rebuilt with 230-kV structures for future load growth planning purposes, the line would continue to be operated at 115-kV under the Proposed Action.

The proposed construction would start in summer 2008 and continue through fall 2010. Details of the Proposed Action are presented in Chapter 2 of the EA.

Alternative

The No Action Alternative assumes that BPA would not remove and replace the transmission line and would continue to operate and maintain the existing transmission line. Construction activities associated with the project would not occur, and the reliability concerns that prompted the proposal for action would continue to be of concern. Maintenance activities would continue within the corridor for the existing line.

Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

To determine whether the Proposed Action or the alternative has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impact of each alternative on human and natural resources was evaluated. This impact analysis is in Chapter 3 of the EA and is summarized for the Proposed Action below. To evaluate potential impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance activities, four impact levels were used—high, moderate, low, and no impact, defined in Appendix C of the EA for each resource. These impact levels are based on the considerations of context and intensity defined in Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27). High impacts could be considered significant impacts, while moderate and low impacts are not. The Proposed Action would have no significant impacts.

The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

Vegetation

Impacts to vegetation and wetlands would be low to moderate.

- About 297 acres of vegetation would be removed temporarily and 71 acres would be removed permanently. Vegetation impacts differ from soil disturbance because portions of the existing roads to be upgraded are not vegetated.
- Disturbed areas would be mitigated by reseeding with an appropriate seed mixture as soon as possible after construction.
- Mapped aspen stands would be avoided and impacts to sagebrush habitat would be minimized.
- Fencing would be built near some structures to discourage off-road use in high-quality shrub/steppe vegetation.

- Noxious weeds would likely spread, but ongoing weed control on the ROW would continue.
- Structures would be rebuilt outside of wetlands. All construction work associated with structure placement or removal would take place outside of wetlands. BPA will implement any mitigation for impacts to waters of the U.S. and wetlands that are identified by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) through the Section 404 permitting process for the Proposed Action.

Wildlife

Low to moderate impacts are expected to wildlife and wildlife habitat during both construction and operation.

- No impacts to federally listed threatened or endangered species are expected.
- There would be some relatively minor impacts to U.S. Forest Service (USFS) sensitive and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) special status species. Activity schedules would be adjusted to avoid impacts to these species if possible.
- Bird flight diverters and other design elements would be used to lessen impacts to birds.

Geology and Soils

Low-to-moderate impacts are expected from construction; most impacts on soils can be mitigated with erosion control measures.

- About 398 acres of soil would be disturbed, with productivity lost on approximately 101 acres permanently.
- Ground-disturbing construction activities would increase the potential for erosion, but erosion would be minor with the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and implementation of provisions of the Eastern Washington Stormwater Management Manual.
- Topsoil would be saved, where practical, for reuse to promote regrowth of native plants.
- Erosion and sediment control devices would limit impacts.
- Disturbed areas would be reseeded after construction.

Water Resources and Fisheries

Low-to-moderate temporary impacts are expected with erosion control and vegetation management measures planned.

- All construction work associated with structure placement or removal would take place outside of wetlands.
- Though in-stream work would occur and could increase erosion, fines and sediment in waterways, erosion and sediment control devices would reduce the potential for impacts from moderate to low.

- An undersized culvert would be replaced in Squaw Creek to accommodate flood flows and fish passage.
- Besides existing structures already located in floodplains, no new structures would be located in floodplains.
- Flood storage capacity would not change.

Air Quality

Impacts to air quality would be low.

- Air emissions from the proposed project would be short-term and would not be expected to exceed any air quality standards.
- Air quality impacts would be expected to occur during construction, but these impacts would be temporary and low.
- Water would be used as needed to minimize dust.
- Disturbed areas would be reseeded after construction.
- Impacts would be temporary, confined to the immediate vicinity, and air quality would not be perceptibly affected.

Socioeconomics and Environmental Justice

Minor positive impacts from the construction project are expected.

- The new transmission line could create a more reliable system, which would be a positive impact.
- Construction would stimulate the area's economy for a short-term benefit.
- The project would create no ongoing impacts during operation and maintenance.
- No disproportionately high or adverse human health or environmental effects to minority and/or low-income populations would occur.

Recreation

Impacts to recreation would be low.

- Access to Fall Creek may be temporarily eliminated and affect recreation, though dispersed camping has already been discouraged or eliminated.
- Construction noise may impact some recreationists, but this impact would be temporary.
- Operation of the Proposed Action would have no adverse effect on existing recreation opportunities near the upgraded alignment because the project features (transmission line structures) already are in place.
- Implementation of the Proposed Action would be compatible with the USFS's, BLM's, and Bonneville and Bingham County's recreation-related goals and management plans.

Land Use

There would be minor or no changes in land use. Low impacts are expected.

- Construction would cause temporary minor and localized disruption to recreation, mining, and farming activities along sections of the right-of-way.
- Land use would not change from existing conditions.

Cultural Resources

With mitigation, no to low impacts are expected to cultural resources.

- The Proposed Action would avoid most identified cultural resources sites.
- For cultural resources sites that cannot be avoided, mitigation measures are identified to protect these sites.
- Mitigation measures are in place if any previously undiscovered cultural resources or human remains/burials are discovered during construction.

Visual Quality

Moderate impacts are expected during construction. Low long-term impacts are expected.

- Temporary impacts are expected during construction when construction activities and equipment and personnel will be visible in the area.
- New structures would be about 15 to 20 feet taller than existing ones.
- Some vegetation would be removed.
- Replacing the structures and conductors would not change the existing visual character of the area. The transmission line would be subordinate to the viewed landscape.

Public Health and Safety

Low impacts are expected.

- Potential safety and fire hazards would be increased during construction from increased traffic and construction activities.
- The presence of the transmission line would pose a hazard to aircraft, but because most structures are slightly taller than the existing line, this is a minor change from existing conditions.
- Maximum electromagnetic fields at the edges of the ROW would be less than 1.5 milligauss and represent a marginal increase in the existing field strength.

Transportation/Traffic

Transportation-related impacts would be low.

- Construction-related traffic could result in increased traffic congestion on local roads leading to the ROW, but this increase would be minor because it would be only periodic and would occur only temporarily during the construction period.
- Mitigation is identified to minimize or avoid impacts to traffic during construction.
- No adverse transportation impacts would be expected during operation of the transmission line because there would be only minimal project-related traffic that would be no different than what currently occurs for the existing line.

Noise

Low to moderate impacts are expected.

- Short-term, low-to-moderate impacts would be created by construction activities.
- The new transmission line would be operated at 115-kV and the transmission line corona noise impacts would remain about the same as the existing line.

Floodplain Statement of Findings

This Floodplain Statement of Findings was prepared in accordance with 10 C.F.R. Part 1022. Notice of floodplain and wetlands involvement was included in the letter sent to the project mailing list announcing the availability of the Preliminary EA, dated April 23, 2008. An assessment of impacts to floodplains and wetlands is in Chapters 3 and 4 of the EA. No comments were received relating to impacts to floodplains.

The reconstructed transmission line would cross the floodplains of Palisades Creek, the South Fork of the Snake River (SFSR), Fall Creek, Willow Creek, and the main Snake River. The Palisades Creek floodplain is crossed between structures 4/7 and 4/8, and about 400 feet of an existing access road would be in the floodplain. The SFSR floodplain is crossed between structures 8/6 and 8/8 and structure 8/7 and about 600 feet of existing access road are within the 100-year floodplain. The Fall Creek floodplain is crossed between structures 13/8 and 13/9, 17/3 and 17/6, and 18/8 and 19/2. Structures 13/8, 17/4, 17/5, 17/8 through 18/6, 19/1, and numerous sections of existing access roads are within this floodplain. Willow Creek is crossed between structures 31/4 and 31/5, with about 600 feet of existing access road within this floodplain. Structures 47/6 through 49/6, all access roads to these structures, and the Goshen Substation are within the 100-year floodplain of the Snake River. Construction of the project within these floodplains is not expected to increase the risk of flooding nor flood damage because all of the roads and structures already exist and the small amount of improvement to existing access roads would not cause floodplain capacity to be decreased significantly.

Determination: Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, BPA determines that the Proposed Action is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.* Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

<u>/s/ G K Delwiche</u>	<u>5/30/08</u>
Gregory K. Delwiche	Date
Vice President	
Environment, Fish and Wildlife	