

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION  
UPPER GREAT PLAINS CUSTOMER SERVICE REGION**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project  
Stark, Slope, and Bowman Counties, North Dakota  
DOE/EA-1596**

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

**ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact**

**SUMMARY:** Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin) has requested to interconnect their proposed new Belfield to Rhame 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and new Rhame Substation (Project) to the Western Area Power Administration's (Western) transmission system at Western's existing Belfield Substation. Under its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (Tariff), Western is required to respond to Basin's interconnection requests. Western's Tariff conforms to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) Final Orders 888, 888A, 888B, and 888C and provides for new interconnections to Western's transmission system by all eligible entities, consistent with Western requirements and subject to environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other environmental regulations. Western's decision is to approve or disapprove the interconnection of the Project with Western's Belfield Substation. Western's approval of this interconnection would require the execution of an interconnection agreement and minor modifications within Western's existing Belfield Substation to interconnect the new Basin transmission line and Rhame Substation.

In accordance with applicable regulations, Western prepared an environmental assessment (EA) entitled "Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project" (DOE/EA-1596). The EA identified and evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with Western's decision on the interconnection request, and of the transmission line Project. In addition to addressing Western's action, the EA evaluates and compares the environmental impacts of three alternative transmission line routes, alternative sites for the proposed Rhame Substation, a microwave relay facility, and a No Action Alternative. Mitigation measures to minimize any environmental impacts were included directly in the Project proposal alternatives. The EA identifies no potentially significant impacts to environmental resources.

The EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on September 16, 2008. Comments received and Western's responses to them are provided later in this document.

Based on the information contained in the EA, Western has determined that approval of the interconnection request and Basin's proposed Project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of

NEPA. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this FONSI.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Additional information and copies of the EA and this FONSI are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

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For further information on the DOE NEPA process, contact:

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**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This FONSI was prepared in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR 1508.13, and the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures, 10 CFR 1021.322.

The FONSI briefly presents the reasons why Western's proposal to approve an interconnection agreement for the Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project, including the described impact mitigation measures outlined in the EA, will not have a significant impact on the human environment. Approval of the interconnection agreement would allow Basin to interconnect their proposed new Belfield to Rhame 230- kV transmission line and new Rhame Substation to Western's transmission system at its existing Belfield Substation. In accordance with the regulations cited above, Western prepared an EA entitled "Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project" (DOE/EA-1596), on Western's action and on Basin's Project. The EA identifies and evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with Western's decision on the interconnection agreement, and of the Project. The EA is incorporated in whole by reference into this FONSI in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.13, which allows a summary discussion in this document.

Prior to making a decision to approve the interconnection of the Belfield to Rhame Project, Western is required to prepare an EA to address NEPA and related environmental

requirements. The EA examines the potential environmental impacts of approving the application for interconnection as well as the No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, Western would not approve the interconnection request. For purposes of providing a no-project environmental baseline, the No Action Alternative assumes that the proposed Project would not be constructed. The EA also analyzes the potential environmental impacts of constructing, operating, and maintaining the Belfield to Rhame transmission line and Rhame Substation. North Dakota Public Service Commission (NDPSC) has siting and regulatory authority for utility projects in the State; their permitting requirements for the transmission line and new substation were integrated into the EA process, which resulted in the selection of a preferred alternative. The EA evaluates and compares three potential transmission line routes, alternative sites for the proposed Rhame Substation, a microwave relay facility, along with the No Action Alternative.

**WESTERN'S ACTION:** Western must decide whether to approve or disapprove Basin's interconnection request at Belfield Substation. Under its Tariff, Western must offer access to capacity on its transmission system when capacity is available, and on a non-discriminatory basis. Western also needs to ensure that by offering such capacity, existing transmission system reliability and service is not degraded by new interconnections. Transmission system studies are conducted to determine the effects on power flows in the event interconnection requests are approved.

The applicant's objectives are also considered in Western's decision process. The FERC Orders direct that interconnection requests be approved unless the transmission system would be adversely affected by the interconnection.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** Basin proposes to construct, own, operate, and maintain a new single-circuit 230-kV Belfield to Rhame transmission line and a new Rhame Substation (the Project) to meet existing and future electric power requirements in southwestern North Dakota. The transmission line would be approximately 75 miles long, and would be located in Stark, Slope, and Bowman counties in southwestern North Dakota. Western's Belfield Substation is located in Stark County, southeast of the City of Belfield. The proposed Rhame Substation would be located in Bowman County, south of the City of Rhame. A new microwave relay facility would be installed on East Rainy Butte, in Slope County. The new transmission line would interconnect with Western's grid at its Belfield Substation. The transmission line would cross privately-owned cultivated and grazing land in a sparsely populated part of southwestern North Dakota, and would occupy a 125-foot right-of-way (ROW).

The proposed transmission system improvements would support Basin's obligation to respond to load growth and provide reliable power to end users. Electrical loads have been increasing in the region, and are largely tied to development of oil and natural gas fields in western North Dakota. Basin has load growth responsibility to its consumers, and must provide additional resources to meet the increased demand and retain the reliability and integrity of its power system. A full and complete project description is included in the EA, which is incorporated into this FONSI by reference.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** The EA contains specific information on notifications to tribes, local, State, and Federal agencies, landowners, and the public. Public scoping meetings were held to discuss the project, determine important issues, obtain local information relevant to the proposed Project, and in general scope and shape the EA analyses. The pre-decisional EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on September 16, 2008. All correspondence is available at Western's Upper Great Plains Customer Service Regional Office. Several comments were received as a result of the review of the pre-decisional EA as outlined below.

**COMMENTS RECEIVED ON THE PREDECISIONAL EA:** Western received comments from two agencies and one individual during the agency and public review of the pre-decisional EA. A letter was received from the State Historical Society of North Dakota concurring with Western's determinations of "No Historic Properties Affected" and "No Significant Sites Affected." Another letter was received from the North Dakota Department of Health, stating that "This department believes that environmental impacts from the proposed construction will be minor and can be controlled by proper construction methods." The letter goes on to address fugitive dust, minimizing disturbance to stream beds and banks, prompt revegetation, spill prevention, storm water discharge permit requirements, and noise abatement as specific concerns. The EA includes best management practices and mitigations that address all of these concerns.

One email response was received from a landowner that included several concerns. These included: potential interference with future oil, gas, and coal leasing and development; the quarter-section alignment across this individual's property and property values; and an objection to the State-required 99-year lease and the included rebuild clause. The proposed transmission line would not negatively affect oil or gas well drilling, as the easement is only 125 feet wide with structures spaced approximately 800 feet apart. Placement of wellheads is not critical as angle drilling is now common practice. If future coal mining is proposed, the transmission lines can be relocated which is the common practice in accommodating mining activities. The mine developer routinely pays for any necessary relocation. The EA covers potential impacts to mineral resources in section 6.2.2.

Basin's engineers and realty specialists worked closely with affected landowners to locate the planned transmission line and, in some cases, spotting individual structure locations. Single-pole structures were selected to minimize impacts to farming operations and, where possible, the alignment followed section, half-section, and quarter section lines. The final location was determined by considering locations of residences and landowner preferences. The respondent acknowledged that her neighbors preferred a mid-section placement, while she would have favored a section line route. Some farmers prefer locating transmission lines along their field margins, while others find it easier to maneuver large equipment around structures if they are located away from the field margins. In either case, with single poles spaced about 800 feet apart the impact on farming operations would be negligible. The routing process attempted to avoid cultivated agricultural land to the extent practicable by favoring routes that crossed pasture or rangeland. The region is devoted to agriculture and avoiding all cultivated land over a 75-mile route was not possible. In some cases the presence of a transmission line can have a negative effect on property values, such as

locations where a line could impact development of property for residential subdivision. Western has no information that would indicate the addition of a transmission line would measurably affect property values in the rural agricultural area this Project is located in. In any case, Basin will reimburse all landowners for full market value for a 125-foot wide easement across their property. Landowners retain full title ownership of their property and the ability to use the easement for farming and grazing purposes. Farmland impacts are addressed in section 6.2.2 of the EA.

Western notes the respondent's objection to the 99-year lease, which the respondent acknowledges is State law. The rebuilding provision in the lease agreement would not extend the term of the lease beyond the mandated 99 years. The reason for the rebuilding clause is to allow Basin to rebuild the transmission line in place should it be damaged or destroyed by a natural or man made disaster. Operation, maintenance, and abandonment of the proposed transmission line are discussed in section 2.7 of the EA.

**ALTERNATIVES:** DOE's NEPA regulations require that an EA include, at a minimum, the proposed action and the no action alternative (10 CFR 1022.321(c)). Western's action is to respond to Basin's interconnection request. If approved, Western would execute an interconnection agreement with Basin, and would make the modifications inside Belfield Substation necessary for the physical connection of Basin's Belfield to Rhame transmission line. Under the no action alternative, Western would not execute an interconnection agreement with Basin, the new transmission line would not be interconnected, and the new Rhame Substation would not be built. The no action alternative provides a baseline against which the environmental impacts of other alternatives are compared. For Western's action, the difference is the modifications in the Belfield Substation.

In order to identify and analyze the potential environmental impacts of Basin's Project, and compare them to no action, it was assumed that the Project would not be constructed if the interconnection request was not approved. Since Basin has mandated load growth responsibility, Basin cannot ignore load growth and must take action to meet it. However, it is conjectural whether this action would be the same project interconnected elsewhere, a similar project, or an entirely different project. The Project as defined above is the only project that Western was requested to interconnect.

The EA documents several alternative routes and alignments that were considered before the preferred alignment was selected. The NDPSC requires a process that identifies corridors and routes within corridors as part of their transmission line permitting process. The NDPSC has identified exclusion areas and avoidance areas, and has established selection and policy criteria. Since Basin has to secure a permit from the NDPSC for their Project, this process was documented in the EA in Chapter 3 - *Corridor Identification and Route Selection*. Project-specific routing criteria are also presented in this chapter. Chapter 4 - *Corridor Description* provides the corridor information required by the State. Chapter 5 - *Transmission Line Routing, Structure Design, and Substation Selection* provides detailed information on the selection of the final alignment and substation location.

The EA incorporates these NDPSC information requirements as they present very detailed

information on Basin's Project, and allow public disclosure of the alternative routes identified and the process followed to determine the proposed alignment. The NDPSC also conducted their own public process on the Project, including public hearings.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF WESTERN'S ACTION:** Western's decision to approve the interconnection would result in minor modifications within Westerns Belfield Substation. The existing substation area has been previously graded and covered with gravel aggregate and is surrounded by a security fence to prevent unauthorized entry and injury. Vegetation is controlled for operational and safety reasons. Modifications to accommodate the proposed interconnection will have no impacts to environmental resources.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF BASIN'S PROJECT:** The EA evaluated the potential for Basin's Project to impact environmental resources found in the Project area. Basin incorporated mitigation measures and best management practices in the description of its proposed Project. The analysis of environmental impacts identified no potential impacts that would be considered significant, and no mitigation measures that should be implemented additional to those already embedded within the Project description. The principal reasons for the lack of significant environmental impact was the avoidance of sensitive resources during siting of the transmission line and Rhame Substation, the ability of transmission lines to span sensitive resources, the minor amount of disturbance at structure locations, and Basin's efforts to work cooperatively with affected landowners. Each landowner had different priorities and concerns. Basin worked very successfully with each landowner to determine how alignments and structure locations could be adjusted to meet their individual needs and preferences to minimize impacts.

**JURISDICTIONS, LAND USE, AND AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES:** Basin located the proposed transmission line route on pasture and rangeland to the extent practicable to minimize impacts to cultivated land. Section, half-section, and quarter section lines were used when crossing cultivated areas; angled crossings were avoided. Single-pole structures were selected instead of H-frame designs to reduce their obstruction to farming practices and to minimize the area susceptible to invasive weed infestations. Permanent loss of land for the transmission line was less than 0.2 acre. Basin purchased an 80-acre parcel from a willing seller for Rhame Substation, of which 12.5 acres would be developed and the rest leased for agricultural purposes. While the ROW would have temporary impacts during construction, landowners would continue to have access to and use of the land. Environmental impacts were determined to be temporary and not significant.

The transmission line would unavoidably cross some Prime and Unique Farmland and Farmlands of Statewide Importance. Temporary disturbance of Prime and Unique Farmland are estimated to be less than 10 acres, and disturbance to Farmlands of Statewide Importance are estimated to be about 300 acres. These temporary impacts would be for one season, and landowners would be reimbursed for any crop losses. Permanent impacts, or land removed from production, would be less than 0.2 acre for the entire line. About 12.5 acres would be occupied by the developed Rhame Substation, mostly classified as Farmlands of Statewide Importance. These losses are not significant considering the amount of cropland in the region. The small area of borings for structure foundations would not constitute a significant impact to soils. Topsoil would be conserved at the substation location.

**PHYSIOLOGY, GEOLOGY, AND MINERALS:** About eight structures would need to be placed in the Little Badlands area of steep barren hills. Badlands by definition have steep slopes, high erosion potential, and sparse vegetation. Recovery from construction impacts would be slow in badland areas, but proper design and erosion mitigation would prevent the initiation of active erosion. Increased erosion resulting from construction activities would be mitigated by proper design and best management practices.

Minerals in the Project area include lignite coal, volcanic ash, scoria, sand, and gravel. Existing and planned mining operations were avoided during the transmission line routing process. If mining operations were ever initiated in the area, the ability to relocate a section of line would limit any impact by the transmission line. Scattered oil wells are found in the vicinity of the transmission line route, but none are located nearby. As discussed earlier, future oil development would not be affected by the line.

**HYDROLOGY AND DRAINAGE:** Drainages and flood prone areas were avoided to the extent practicable during routing. No structures would be placed in floodplains, and drainages and wetlands would be spanned by the transmission line. These areas would also be avoided by construction vehicles during construction. Structures are typically located on higher areas, as shorter structures can be used while still achieving necessary ground clearance. Because of avoidance and erosion control measures on upland construction areas, hydrology and drainage would not be adversely affected.

**VEGETATION AND WETLAND RESOURCES:** The transmission line would cross predominantly grassland and cropland. During the routing process, grassland and rangeland was favored to minimize the impacts to landowner farming operations. Nearly 92 percent of the land crossed falls into these two categories. Small tracts of shrub/steppe, badlands, riparian and wetlands, and forested land make up the remaining eight percent. Of these, the forested category is nearly all comprised of planted windbreaks, and the riparian and wetland category is largely drainages and wetlands that would be spanned. Grassland would recover quickly from the temporary disturbance caused by construction activities. Best management practices would limit the extent and level of disturbance, and would include tilling compacted soils and reseeded where needed. Impacts to cropland would be temporary and would be restored with the planting of new crops. Trees and shrubs removed during construction would be replaced on a two-for-one basis in cooperation with landowners.

While the calculations show that 10.6 acres of riparian areas and wetlands would be crossed, these areas would be spanned by the transmission line and avoided by construction vehicles. Swales that are cultivated could be crossed by construction vehicles during dry periods. Noxious weeds exist in the Project area. Equipment would be washed before entering the Project area, certified weed-free straw and re-seeding mixtures would be used, and disturbed areas would be monitored following construction for weed infestations. Control of any infestations would be coordinated with appropriate Federal, State, and local agencies and landowners. Significant impacts would not occur to vegetation or wetland resources.

**Wildlife and Fisheries:** The majority of wildlife species in the Project area would temporarily relocate during construction activities, and return after construction is complete. Some individuals

of ground-dwelling and/or less mobile species could be lost to construction activities, but the losses would be biologically insignificant. The amount of available forage and cover would be temporarily reduced, but would recover quickly naturally, or as a result of mitigation measures outlined in the previous section. Impacts to nesting migratory birds would be mitigated through pre-construction nesting surveys and the establishment of buffers around active nests as necessary. No impacts to fisheries or aquatic species are anticipated. Aquatic habitat was either avoided or spanned.

**SPECIAL STATUS SPECIES:** Federally-listed species in the Project area include the black-footed ferret, gray wolf, and whooping crane. No prairie dog towns suitable for black-footed ferret habitat would be affected by the Project. The gray wolf (if present) is highly mobile and would avoid human construction activity. The North Dakota Game and Fish Department (NDGFD) considers the gray wolf to be extirpated in the State.

Collision with distribution and transmission lines is the greatest single source of mortality to migrating whooping cranes. The Project area is located at the extreme western edge of the designated whooping crane migration corridor, so the potential for individuals to be present in the Project area is low. Basin will mark the line with bird diverter devices in areas near suitable whooping crane stop-over habitat in concert with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There is no designated critical habitat in the Project area.

The NDGFD identified 49 animal and 6 plant Species of Conservation Priority that occur in Williams and Montrail counties. Many of these species are found in specialized habitats that were recognized and avoided during routing. Seventeen of the animal species would not be affected or would have little chance of being affected by the Project. While the remaining species could be present, and could be affected by construction, most impacts would be temporary, and no long-term or significant impacts were identified. Assessments for each individual species are provided in sections 6.6.2.2 and 6.6.2.3 of the EA.

**ARCHEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC RESOURCES:** A Class I file search was completed for all three corridors. For the preferred alternative, four sites were located within 500 feet of the centerline, and one of those, a historic farm, was within 75 feet. However, the farm structures at this site were at least 500 feet away from the centerline. The other sites were two ranches and a historic scatter/depression/foundation, the latter being recommended as not eligible for the National Register. A Class III pedestrian survey was completed along the proposed transmission line route. The survey identified 11 sites and 8 isolated finds. Four of the sites and all of the isolated finds were prehistoric. All but two of the sites were recommended as not eligible for the National Register by the archaeological consultant. Of the two sites, a prehistoric lithic scatter, was located outside of the area that would be disturbed by construction, and the other, a railroad line, would be spanned by the transmission line. Since they would not be affected by the proposed Project, these two sites were not formally evaluated for eligibility. No sites eligible for the National register would be impacted by the proposed Project.

**NATIVE AMERICAN SETTING:** No Traditional Cultural Use Areas, sacred sites, or other potentially sensitive areas were identified by Native American tribes with past or present affiliation to the Project area. No impacts to areas considered important by the tribes are anticipated.



**PALEONTOLOGICAL RESOURCES:** The Project area is located in an area with abundant paleontological, or fossil, resources. Paleontological resources located on State lands are protected under North Dakota's Paleontological Resource Protection Act, while those on private land are not protected. Basin has committed to having a paleontological monitor present during construction on bedrock or areas where rocky substrate is exposed. Given the limited impact of the proposed Project on bedrock or rocky substrate, it is unlikely that construction of the project would affect paleontological resources of State-wide importance. While damage to fossils is a possibility, construction projects are often the cause of significant fossil discoveries. These paleontological resources would otherwise remain undiscovered, and unavailable to the scientific community. No significant impacts to paleontological resources are expected.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Regional transportation facilities would be used to transport materials and workers to the Project site. The transmission line would cross roads, highways, and a rail line. The line would not interfere with airports in the vicinity. Local traffic would increase during the six- to eight-month construction period, but specific locations would shift as work progressed along the approximately 75-mile long line route. About 70 construction workers would be expected at the peak, and they would be scattered among several work areas. Flat-bed trucks would haul pole sections and other material to staging areas, and to structure sites. The increase in traffic would be locally noticeable, but traffic volumes and population densities are low in the area. There could be a negligible increased risk of traffic accidents, or temporary inconveniences to area residents due to the presence of large trucks and construction equipment on the county roads in the region.

**SOCIOECONOMICS:** The impact of the proposed Project on socioeconomics would be mixed, and can best be characterized as temporarily beneficial. Construction crews would bring outside dollars into the local economy for goods and services such as fuel, meals, lodging, concrete, seed, aggregate, and machinery repair. Negative impacts to housing, community facilities and services, and population are not expected. Landowners would receive full market value for easements crossing their lands, and would be able to continue using the ROW for crop farming, grazing, and most other uses. A negligible amount of land would be removed from permanent production, and any reduction in productivity should be temporary. Direct crop losses due to construction activities would be compensated for by Basin through crop damage payments. Socioeconomic impacts would be temporary and insignificant.

**PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY:** Transportation of materials would be in conformance with U.S. Department of Transportation regulations. Road, highway, and railroad crossings would have temporary H-frame safety structures installed to ensure conductors do not sag during installation. Construction crews would operate under applicable National Electric Safety Code and Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations. While some risk of injury is always present on construction sites, compliance with regulations would hold this risk to a minimum.

Electric shock hazard would be minimized by maintaining proper ground clearances, which would allow the safe operation of farm machinery under the line. Should the line be damaged by severe weather, equipment at the substations would sense a fault and de-energize the line, preventing any shock hazard to maintenance workers or the public. An overhead ground wire will divert lightning

strikes to the ground protecting the transmission line. The Rhame Substation would be fenced to keep out unauthorized people and livestock. Stray and induced currents would be eliminated through proper grounding of metal objects, such as fences. Electric and magnetic fields (EMF) have been studied for over 30 years. Some studies have shown a possible connection between EMF exposure and health, while other studies have not. In general, studies showing any correlation have shown statistical significance just above threshold values, and the statistical significance was not replicated in subsequent studies. Research and debate continue on the subject of EMF, but thus far no deleterious health effects can be tied to transmission line EMF. In any case, EMF levels near a transmission line drop to background levels within 300 feet. No residences are located within 500 feet of the proposed transmission line, and population levels are very low in the Project area. The primary EMF exposure will continue to be occupational, or fields in their own homes from electrical wiring and appliances.

**ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:** There would be no disproportionately high or adverse health or environmental impacts on minority or low income populations as the result of constructing, operating, and maintaining the proposed Project.

**VISUAL RESOURCE SETTING:** The proposed transmission line would introduce a linear feature to the rural crop and pastureland area that would be obtrusive to some viewers. Population densities are low, limiting the number of viewers. Basin has worked with landowners to site the line so as to minimize the impacts, including visual impacts. The visual impacts to motorists would be low and short term; impacts are higher to area residents. Impacts are reduced with distance from the line, and the selection of single-pole structures should also lessen visual impacts. The rolling topography will partially hide the line, depending on the observer's location. The addition of the transmission line would result in unavoidable visual impacts, but they are considered to be less than significant.

**NOISE:** The construction of the proposed Project would generate vehicle noise for the six- to eight-month duration of the construction phase. Operation of the transmission line and substation once completed would not generate appreciable noise. Existing noise levels are established by wind, farm equipment operation, and vehicle traffic. Construction noise would be similar to farm equipment, and would move from structure site to structure site. Noise would be very temporary at any given location as a result. An exception would be the Rhame Substation site, which has one residence about one-half mile away, and another a mile away. These residents would hear construction activities over a longer period of time. Noise impacts would be sporadic and temporary at most locations, and would cease with the completion of the Project.

**AIR QUALITY:** The Project area is presently in attainment of the National and State Ambient Air Quality Standards. Construction equipment emissions would result in localized and temporary air quality impacts during construction activities. Construction equipment movement and operation would result in airborne dust. Compared with agricultural operations, the impacts to air quality from construction activities would be negligible. No Federal or State air quality standard would be violated by the construction of the proposed Project.

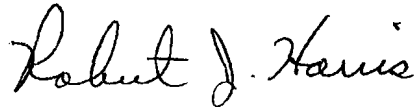
**INTENTIONAL DESTRUCTIVE ACTS:** Transmission lines and substations can be the target of intentional destructive acts ranging from random vandalism and theft, to sabotage and acts of

terrorism. In this remote area, random vandalism (often damage to insulators from firearms) and theft are the major concerns. Standard security measures, including fencing, would be installed to protect the substation. Vandalism risk should be low due to the predominance of private property and landowner vigilance. Substantial hardships would not result if the line were to be taken out of service due to an intentional destructive act, and the facility should be quickly returned to service.

**CUMULATIVE IMPACTS:** The rural character of the area is expected to be maintained for the immediate future. The cumulative impact analysis identified only the proposed South Heart Coal, LLC, lignite mine and coal gasification plant, and the construction of a new airport near Bowman. Neither would result in significant cumulative impacts.

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the information contained in the EA, Western has determined that its action to approve the interconnection request, and Basin's proposed Project, does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, considering the impact mitigation measures and best management practices as described in the EA that are to be implemented over the course of the Project, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this FONSI.

Issued at Billings, Montana, on FEBRUARY 18, 2009.



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