**Creston-Bell Transmission Line Rebuild Project**

**Department of Energy**
**Bonneville Power Administration**

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**
**and Wetland and Floodplain Statement of Findings**
**DOE/EA-4406**

## Summary

The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) announces its environmental findings on the Creston-Bell Transmission Line Rebuild Project (Rebuild Project or Proposed Action). The Proposed Action is to rebuild the 53.8-mile-long 115-kilovolt (kV) Creston-Bell transmission line, conduct work on access roads, and remove danger trees. The existing 53.8-mile-long transmission line was built in 1942 and extends east from the existing Creston Substation, located in Lincoln County, Washington, to the existing Bell Substation, located in the city of Spokane, Washington.

BPA has prepared an environmental assessment (EA) (DOE/EA-4406) evaluating the Proposed Action and the No Action 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 Finding of No Significant Impact (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. The Revision Sheet also identifies changes made to the Preliminary EA.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan that lists all of the mitigation measures that BPA and its contractors are committed to implementing. Wetland and floodplain findings are also included in this FONSI. Impacts to wetlands and floodplains 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 http://efw.bpa.gov/environmental_services/Document_Library/Creston_Bell/.

## Proposed Action

BPA is proposing to replace the aging and deteriorating wood pole structures and associated structural components that comprise the existing Creston-Bell 115-kV transmission line. The transmission line was originally built in 1942 by BPA. The original conductor has never been replaced and does not meet current standards. In general, wood poles for transmission lines are

expected to have a service life of 55 to 60 years, at which point they are usually replaced due to age, rot, and other forms of deterioration. Today, the existing wood-pole structures and conductors exceed their service life and show normal deterioration due to age. In addition, the bases of some structures have been undermined because the underlying soils are unstable. The Proposed Action would also involve improvements to existing access roads and some new access road construction, as well as removal of danger trees outside the existing right-of-way (ROW).

The proposed construction would begin in May 2012 and continue through November 2012. Details of the Proposed Action are presented in Chapter 2 of the EA.

## No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative assumes that BPA would not rebuild the Creston-Bell transmission line and would continue to operate and maintain the existing transmission line. Construction activities associated with the Rebuild 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 corridors for the existing lines.

Because of the condition of the lines, it is likely that the No Action Alternative would require more frequent maintenance activities within the corridor than under the Proposed Action. Given the poor condition of some of the roads, it is possible that the road work proposed under the Proposed Action would be funded and carried out as an operation and maintenance project in the future, independent of rebuilding the transmission line. Future operation and maintenance under the No Action Alternative would also include removal of the danger trees identified in Appendix A of the EA.

## Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action

To determine whether the Proposed Action or the No Action Alternative has the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impacts of each alternative on human and natural resources was evaluated. This impact analysis is presented 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. These impact levels are based on the considerations of context and intensity defined in Council of Environmental Quality regulations (40 Code of Federal Regulations 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.

### LAND USE AND RECREATION

Impacts to land use and recreation would be low.

- Most new transmission line structures would be replaced in the same location as the existing structures and would not change land uses. However, agricultural land would be permanently impacted by seven structures that would be offset from existing structure sites and about 3.0 acres of new access road. Given the small area of impact compared

with the overall agricultural capacity of the Lincoln and Spokane counties, the associated impacts on agricultural production would be low.

- Landowners that would have construction impacts in actively cultivated fields would be compensated for loss of crops and field disturbance.
- Construction and maintenance activities would cause only brief, temporary interruption to residential and recreational use areas, including the Riverside State Park and Centennial Trail, and temporary traffic delays on local roads and highways.

## GEOLOGY AND SOILS

Impacts to geology and soils would be low to moderate.

- Ground disturbing activities would potentially expose soils to rain, but erosion would be reduced with the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) including revegetating areas following construction.

## VEGETATION

Impacts to vegetation would be low to moderate.

- The approximate 274 trees (Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine) that would need to be removed at the edge of the ROW and the shrub-steppe and nonnative grasses that would be removed along new or improved access roads or disturbed with construction activities is common vegetation for the area.
- No federally listed endangered or threatened plants species would be impacted within the project ROW. Some Washington State sensitive plant species would potentially be impacted by the project, but would be avoided to the extent possible. Additional vegetation surveys would be conducted prior to construction along off-ROW access routes to ensure sensitive plant species would not be impacted. If found during surveys, populations would be flagged to limit work in those areas.
- Areas of disturbance would be reseeded using native seed mixes, where appropriate, to help reestablish vegetation and reduce the potential spread of noxious weed infestations.

## WATER RESOURCES AND WATER QUALITY

Impacts to water resources and water quality would be low.

- A stormwater pollution prevention plan would be prepared and implemented to reduce erosion and runoff and stabilize disturbed areas. Use of BMPs would also minimize impacts to water quality from turbidity and sedimentation.
- New and improved access roads would be composed of a compacted gravel surface with drainage ditches, culverts, and/or water bars, as necessary, to prevent surface erosion or other road failure.
- All culvert installations or replacements in streams would occur in the dry to avoid potential turbidity impacts on water quality during installation.

- Replacement of the existing structures and new and reconstructed access roads would not be expected to have a noticeable effect on overall groundwater infiltration rates in the study area.

**FISH AND WILDLIFE**

Impacts to fish and wildlife would be low to moderate.

- Four of the 475 existing pole structures that would be replaced are within 100 feet of a fish-bearing stream. Use of BMPs would minimize or eliminate the delivery of sediments from pole replacement activities for these structures into nearby streams.
- Proposed culvert installations or replacements cross four intermittent streams; however, none of these streams are fish-bearing.
- Access would involve the use of 12 fords, mostly along existing roads that would be reconstructed or improved under the Proposed Action. One of these fords (between structures 43/7 and 44/1) crosses a known fish-bearing stream. Use of this ford during construction would be infrequent and of short duration, and limited to periods when the stream is dry or when flows are likely to be low, thereby reducing the chance for increased turbidity and fish being present.
- Removal of danger trees from riparian areas along fish-bearing streams has the potential to reduce both shade and future instream fish habitat. The potential reduction in tree cover from danger tree removal would be small relative to the amount of cover along a particular stream corridor and result in very little or no change to riparian function from current conditions.
- Noise and activity associated with construction would displace wildlife, but impacts would be temporary and localized.
- The lack of observations and absence of suitable habitat suggests that the potential for direct impacts to the greater sage grouse is low. Potential direct impacts to sharp-tailed grouse would be limited by scheduling construction activities outside of the lekking/nesting season (March 1-April 30).
- BPA would mark the rebuilt transmission line with bird flight diverters over any major water body that may be a potential flyway for migratory bird species (water fowl) where appropriate. The addition of these bird flight diverters would reduce the potential for future migratory bird (water fowl) collisions.

**WETLANDS**

Impacts to wetlands would be low to moderate.

- Of the six wetlands that would be impacted by structures, four are low quality Category III wetlands and one is a Category II wetland; the structures in these locations would be removed and replaced in the same holes. The one high quality Category I wetland would have a structure removed only; the new structure would be located outside of the wetland boundary. The wetland area of impact at each of the sites would likely be 0.1 acre or less and flagging would be installed to restrict vehicle and equipment access to protect these sensitive habitats.

- Although road construction would occur in six wetlands, it would affect a combined total of about 0.25 acre of lower quality (Category III) wetlands. Road reconstruction and the use of travel routes would affect a combined total of 0.03 acre and 0.43 acre of wetland, respectively. Adverse impacts to wetland hydrology would be prevented by the appropriate use of culverts at proper elevations.
- BPA will coordinate with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Washington Department of Ecology for appropriate permits.

**FLOODPLAINS**

Impacts to floodplains would be low to moderate.

- One structure within the 100-year floodplain of the Spokane River would be removed, with the replacement structure installed outside the floodplain. One new structure would be installed within the 100-year floodplain of Deep Creek. These removal and installation activities would have negligible effects on the flood storage capacity, direction of flood flows, and wildlife habitat value of the affected floodplains.
- Road construction and road reconstruction/improvement would disturb about 0.01 acre and 0.19 acre of land within 100-year floodplains, respectively. Activities such as grading or rocking road surfaces and removing vegetation could result in minor soil compaction and erosion, but would have little effect on the flood storage capacity or direction of flood flows.

**VISUAL QUALITY**

Impacts to visual quality would be low to moderate.

- Because a majority of the project would replace existing wood-pole structures within an existing transmission line corridor containing three other larger lattice-steel transmission lines, the Rebuild Project would not alter the existing visual landscape. Construction activities would have minor temporary visual impacts where visible to residents, recreationist or motorists.
- Replacement of two existing wood-pole structures with one lattice-steel structure at Riverside State Park would create a visual change and an additional industrial feature at the park. However, there are three existing lattice-steel transmission lines running through the park in this area, so the new lattice-steel structure would not appear to be out of place or be a dominant feature in this area.
- The 10.1 total miles of road construction would consist of numerous short spur roads from existing access mostly within the existing ROW. Although the road work would create a permanent change to the visual landscape, it would not be out of character with the existing roads or transmission lines.

## AIR QUALITY

Impacts to air quality would be low.

- Air pollutants released during construction activities (particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, and volatile organic compounds) would be released on a temporary basis within a localized area and the amounts would be relatively small compared to amounts released in agricultural and urban areas crossed by the project.
- The limited amounts of ozone and nitrogen oxide released by the transmission line as a result of corona effect would be insubstantial.

## SOCIOECONOMICS AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Impacts to socioeconomics and public services would be low.

- The Proposed Action would have a small, positive impact on the regional economy during construction through the local procurement of materials and equipment and spending by construction workers.
- Because the underlying land ownership would not change there would be no impact to property taxes.
- The Proposed Action would not be expected to have an effect on public services or utilities.

## CULTURAL RESOURCES

Impacts to cultural resources would be low to moderate.

- Cultural resources identified in the project vicinity are either ineligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Place or will be avoided. Mitigation measures would ensure that if previously undiscovered cultural resources were found during construction, appropriate protocol would be followed.

## NOISE, PUBLIC HEALTH, AND SAFETY

Impacts to noise, public health, and safety would be low to moderate.

- Construction activities would result in short-term and intermittent noise impacts as construction progresses along the transmission line corridor and would be limited to daylight hours. Noise associated with helicopter use to install conductors would likely exceed noise thresholds for some sensitive receptors, but would generally be less than 10 minutes at each structure and would likely not be in any given line mile for more than 3 hours.
- Corona-related audible noise during line operation and periodic noise impacts due to maintenance activities would be similar to those currently experienced.
- Potential safety impacts during construction would be mitigated with standard construction safety procedures.

- There would be no changes to the electromagnetic field (EMF) environment except in a few isolated cases where pole heights would be increased and EMF levels would decrease slightly within the existing ROW.
- The Proposed Action would result in new, properly installed connecting hardware that would reduce any risk associated with aging hardware spark-discharge activity.

**CLIMATE CHANGE**

Impacts from greenhouse gas emissions would be low.

- Greenhouse gas emissions from construction, tree clearing, and operations and maintenance activities over the life of the line would be far below EPA mandatory reporting threshold and would not represent a substantial change from current conditions.

## 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 United States Code 4321 *et seq*.). Therefore, an EIS will not be prepared and BPA is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

*/s/ F. Lorraine Bodi* — *May 7, 2012*
Lorri Bodi — Date
Vice President
Environment, Fish and Wildlife