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DOE/EA-1685

Department of Energy, Western Area Power Administration
Finding of No Significant Impact
and Floodplain Statement of Findings
Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line Rebuild, Upgrade
and Right-of-Way Action

Summary - The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to rebuild and upgrade the existing Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line located in San Bernardino County, California and Mohave and La Paz counties, Arizona. The transmission line extends from Western's Parker Substation located in San Bernardino County, California, to Southwest Transmission Cooperative, Inc. (SWTC) Structure 1 (SWTC #1) located in Mohave County, Arizona, a distance of approximately 7.1 miles. SWTC #1 is approximately 0.3 mile beyond Western's Planet Tap. Western owns the transmission line up to SWTC #1. New right-of-way (ROW) authorizations for the Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line are required from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for the portions of the transmission line and access roads that cross their respective lands.

Western is the lead Federal agency responsible for preparing the environmental assessment (EA). BLM and USFWS are cooperating agencies.

The EA, titled "Draft for Pre-Approval for Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line Rebuild, Upgrade and Right-of-Way Action" (DOE/EA-1685), was distributed on May 3, 2010, for pre-approval review by Federal, state, tribal, and local agencies that have jurisdiction or permitting authority for the Proposed Action, and affected landowners. In response to comments received, a final EA was prepared to clarify and correct information in the draft EA. The final EA is approved concurrently with this finding of no significant impact (FONSI).

Based on findings and analysis in the EA, Western has determined that with the resource protection measures, the Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line Rebuild, Upgrade and Right-of-Way Action (Proposed Action) would not result in any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI.

Additional information and copies of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the following contact:

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Purpose and Need - Western's purpose is to improve the safety and reliability of providing electrical service to its customers serviced by the existing Parker-Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line north and east of Parker, Arizona. The existing transmission line was built around 1947 and has deteriorated due to aging and weathering. A substantial number of the wood structures have deteriorated and no longer maintain structural integrity and strength due to shell rot and heavy weathering with deep surface cracking extending into the heartwood. Many structures are out of alignment, heavily guyed, and raked or bowed. Numerous structure crossarms have been replaced, others are cracked and need repair, and several have metal braces to keep them from splitting. The condition of the structures makes them unsafe for maintenance personnel to climb. Replacing the aging wood structures with steel structures, as well as adding an overhead ground wire to protect the line from lightning, would increase the reliability of the line and reduce future maintenance costs and efforts. In addition, repairing the degraded access roads would enable crews to reach structures more quickly, resulting in less repair time and shorter customer outages.

Western recently discovered that its ROW case number with BLM for the Parker-Planet Tap transmission line had been closed. As a result, Western submitted an application to BLM for new ROW authorization across BLM land. The new ROW would be authorized by BLM under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA). Western also submitted an application to USFWS for ROW authorization across USFWS lands. The new ROW would be authorized by the USFWS in accordance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966. The footprint of the rebuilt transmission line would be identical to the 100-foot wide ROW of the existing transmission line, except for the 0.5-mile reroute, and all associated access roads.

Project Description – Western proposes to rebuild the existing transmission line and improve associated access roads from Buckskin Tap (Structure 2/10) to SWTC #1 and update ROW documents for the entire transmission line. The existing wood structures would be replaced with metal H-frame, monopole or three-pole structures. The new metal structures would be placed adjacent to existing structures in-line with the existing transmission line where electrical clearances allow. Approximately 0.5 mile of the transmission line (Structures 4/4 to 4/6) would be moved outside the riparian area to a new location/alignment adjacent to the Bill Williams River Road. The existing conductor would be replaced with a larger, new conductor. Overhead ground wire would be added to provide lightning protection for the circuit. All other hardware and insulators would be replaced.

The existing disconnect switches located both north and south of the Bill Williams River on existing Structures 5/3 and 7/1 would be replaced with new switches on Structures 5/6 and 6/1

on the south side of the river. The portion of the transmission line from new Structure 5/6 to new Structure 7/1 would be converted to double circuit by installing two independent circuits (three conductors per circuit) on the same structures. In conjunction with the two switches, two separate sets of conductors would be "stacked" with all three phases of each circuit on separate crossarms. Western would own the top set of conductors, and Arizona Public Service (APS) would own the bottom set of conductors on the double-circuit portion of the line. The new switches would allow service on either or both transmission lines to be interrupted from easily accessible sites close to the main access road south of the Bill Williams River. The Planet Tap would be relocated from Structure 7/1 to new Structure 6/1.

Improvements to access roads would involve minor grading and the installation of corrugated metal pipes (CMPs) to maintain stormwater flows in washes. New road construction would be required between Structures 5/6 and 6/2 to provide access to Structures 6/1 and 6/2. This new road, about 12-feet wide and 0.3-mile long, would follow a different route from that used for the original construction.

The footprint of the rebuilt transmission line would be identical to the 100-foot-wide ROW of the existing transmission line, except for the 0.5-mile reroute, and all associated access roads. The existing 50-foot wide access roads ROW meanders in and out of the transmission line ROW. The footprint also includes a short-term ROW near SWTC #1 and a parking and assembly area. All construction-related work would be conducted within the transmission line and road ROW authorized area.

Restoration would be completed following construction and cleanup. Disturbed surfaces would be restored to the original contour as required by the BLM and the USFWS. All disturbed soil, other than surfaces intended for permanent access roads, would be seeded with native species free of invasive seed. Seeding within the boundary of the Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge (BWRNWR) would be accomplished with native seed gathered within the refuge. Water diversions (i.e., waterbars) would be constructed along the access roads to control surface water drainage and erosion. Access roads would be closed using a natural barrier or gate.

Agency Consultation and Public Participation Process – Western sent letters in November 2009 to notify Federal, state, local, and tribal governments, landowners, and other interested parties and stakeholders of the Proposed Action. Western solicited public comment through local newspaper notifications in Parker, Lake Havasu, Blythe, and Kingman during the week of November 30, 2009. No public comments were received as a result of these notifications. An agency meeting was held at the USFWS BWRNWR office on November 23, 2009. Twelve representatives from Western, USFWS, and the BLM (Lake Havasu Field Office) attended. Western provided a detailed description of the project and requested the agencies to identify issues and management concerns related to the project.

Western distributed a draft EA for pre-approval review of the proposed project on May 3, 2010. Comments received were incorporated into the final EA and considered in Western's determination of whether an EIS is required. The final EA is approved concurrently with this FONSI.

Western consulted with the USFWS, determining that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the southwestern willow flycatcher, the Yuma clapper rail, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo. The USFWS concurred with Western's findings in a letter dated February 11, 2010. With the USFWS concurrence, Western has met its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) (7 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

Consultation with the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) in accordance with procedures provided in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800 "Protection of Historic Properties") was conducted. Western determined that the Proposed Action will not adversely affect historic properties. Western received concurrence on its finding of no adverse effect from the Arizona SHPO on March 23, 2010.

Under Federal agency regional plans, the Proposed Action is subject to the BLM *Lake Havasu Field Office Record of Decision and Approved Resource Management Plan* (LHFORMP). As part of this project, BLM would issue ROW authorization under FLPMA to Western for the transmission line and access roads across their lands. More specifically, the ROW AZA 35132 would be granted to Western for lands either previously authorized under case number PHX 080802 or presently under the jurisdiction of BLM.

The USFWS would issue a ROW permit or easement under the Bill Williams NWR Tract (E12) to Western for the transmission line and access roads that cross the BWRNWR. Short-term ROW near SWTC #1 would also be granted for a temporary staging area for large equipment. The ROW permit or easement would be granted to Western for lands either previously authorized under case number AZPHX 080802 or presently under the jurisdiction of USFWS. The USFWS ROW permit or easement will be in conformance with 50 CFR § 29.21-9.

Western contacted seven Indian tribal governments regarding this project to determine if they had concerns or issues regarding cultural resources, traditional cultural properties, or religious practices. Western initiated consultation with these Indian tribes on the basis of proximity of ancestral lands to the project area or stated interest. Western sent letters and followed up with phone calls to the Chemehuevi Tribe, Cocopah Tribe, Colorado River Indian Tribes, Fort Mojave Tribe, Hopi Tribe, Hualapai Tribe, and Yavapai-Prescott Indian Tribe. Tribes were also offered opportunities to participate in site visits and to review and comment on draft cultural resource survey reports. The EA was distributed to the tribes for review and comment on May 3, 2010. No comments on the EA were received from the tribes. A field visit occurred on May 4, 2010, and was attended by Western and a Hualapai Tribal Historic Preservation Office representative.

Alternatives - DOE's NEPA regulations require that an EA include a discussion of the No Action Alternative (10 CFR 1021.362 (c)). Under the No Action Alternative, Western would not reconstruct the Parker–Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line and BLM and USFWS would not issue ROW authorization to Western. Western would continue to operate and maintain the Parker–Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line as it currently exists, with its aging and deteriorating wood structures. Structure replacement and frequent emergency repairs are likely. Safety of the public would be impacted with aging structures in place long past their serviceable life expectancy of 50 years (reached in the 1990s). Unplanned outages due to failure of aged equipment are possible.

Environmental Impacts – Findings on the impacts and their significance resulting from the Proposed Action are based on information contained in the EA. In reaching conclusions about the Proposed Action's environmental impacts, Western considered resource protection measures and construction practices as defined in the EA. The existing environmental and potential environmental impacts were identified and evaluated for the following resources: land use and ownership, visual resources, biological resources (including vegetation, wildlife, threatened or endangered species, sensitive and special status species, birds protected under the

Migratory Bird Treaty Act, fish habitat, and wild horses/burros), soils, water resources (including floodplains; water quality, drinking, surface, or ground water; waters of the U.S.; and wetlands/riparian zones), cultural resources, public health and safety, noise, solid wastes and hazardous materials, fuels/fire management, energy policy, and intentional destructive acts. Cumulative impacts are also addressed in the EA.

Western has concluded that the Proposed Action would not result in any significant impacts. The basis for Western's conclusion is summarized below.

Land Use and Ownership. The existing transmission line has been in continuous use since 1947. The transmission line would be constructed within the same 100-foot-wide ROW, except for the approximately 0.5-mile reroute, and the majority of the access roads are the same roads used to construct the original line. Construction and operation of the Proposed Action and the new ROW authorization from BLM and USFWS would not result in changes to the existing landowners or land uses, would not conflict with or impede the implementation of any land use plans or special use areas within the project area, and there would be no nuisance impacts attributable to incompatible land uses. Although there may be some temporary disruption to recreation in the areas immediately adjacent to the construction areas to ensure public safety during construction, there would be no changes in recreational opportunities upon completion of the Proposed Action. Construction and operation of the Proposed Action and the new ROW authorization from BLM and USFWS would not increase the demand for recreation and would not conflict with, physically alter, or decrease accessibility to established or planned recreational areas. No construction activities would occur within any designated Wilderness Areas. Therefore, no effect to Wilderness Areas would occur. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to land use and ownership.

Visual Resources. Aged wood structures would be replaced with new metal H-frame, monopole, or three-pole structures. At the request of the USFWS, Western would use structures with a "rusty" appearance in order to blend in with the natural look of the refuge area. The new insulators would be of a gray polymer designed to reduce visibility. Ancillary equipment such as conductors and hardware would be more visible than the existing equipment. However, their increased visibility would be short-term and diminish over time until weathering returns them to a less reflective condition. The approximately 0.5-mile segment of the transmission line rerouted within the BWRNWR would be closer to an existing road; this would reduce the impact of man-made features on the natural character of the landscape, and the need for access roads to individual structures. The new access road between Structures 5/6 and 6/2 is not in a location that would be highly visible by the general public. The area along the transmission line has many small access roads along its length, and the new roadway would not be a notable new feature. The improvements to the existing roads may create a short-term increase in contrast to the roadways and the surrounding landscape but would diminish over time as weathering occurs. Construction and operation of the Proposed Action would not create a dominant visual change that would degrade the character or scenic quality or create a visual eyesore. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to visual resources.

Biological Resources.

Vegetation. Vegetation removal would only occur to the extent necessary to remove the existing transmission line and construct the rerouted transmission line near an existing road and away from the riparian area. Vegetation removal in this area would likely have a short-term negative impact. Rerouting the 0.5 mile segment of the transmission line outside the riparian area would eliminate the need to routinely trim the riparian vegetation and is anticipated to have a net positive impact on the riparian vegetation in the Mosquito Flats area. The primary impacts to vegetation in the upland areas would come from road maintenance and construction, and from clearing of work areas. Any loss of vegetation or introduction of noxious weeds would be minimized through implementation of resource protection measures. Vegetation removal associated with the Proposed Action would not result in a loss of any population of sensitive plants that would jeopardize the continued existence of that population and would not result in a species being listed or proposed for listing as endangered or threatened.

Wildlife. Clearing and excavation activities are likely to result in some displacement of small reptiles, mammals, and birds, and could injure or kill small reptiles and mammals if present during construction. The work to clear new and improved access roads would fragment habitat and may act as an impediment to the movement of individual small mammals and reptiles but not affect the movement of any local species population as a whole. While the Proposed Action may have a short-term impact on bighorn sheep, it is not anticipated to have any long-term impacts. The Proposed Action may interfere with one year's breeding period of bighorn sheep; however, it will not contribute to a loss of population viability or result in Federal listing of the species because only localized disturbance along the Bill Williams River would occur. The Proposed Action would not result in the loss of any population of wildlife or wildlife habitat that would jeopardize the continued existence of that population or result in the species being listed or proposed for listing as endangered or threatened. Construction of the existing line and access road improvements and new road construction would not interfere with the movement of any native, resident, or migratory wildlife species for more than two reproductive seasons, would not result in the local loss of wildlife habitat, and would not reduce the range of occurrence of any wildlife species.

Threatened or Endangered Species. Western determined that the Proposed Action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, the southwestern willow flycatcher, the Yuma clapper rail, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo. Western conducted ESA Section 7 formal consultation with the USFWS. The USFWS concurred with Western's determination on February 11, 2010. Resource protection measures would be implemented to minimize impacts to threatened or endangered species. The Proposed Action would not jeopardize the continued existence of a Federally-listed species, lower a species status, adversely modify critical habitat, or modify habitat used by a special status species for resting, nesting, feeding, or escape cover.

Sensitive and Special Status Species. The banded Gila monster, common chuckwalla, and desert rosy boa may reside in the desertscrub vegetation within the project area. While this project may impact individuals of these three species, it is unlikely to impact overall population viability or contribute to a trend toward Federal listing. Resource protection measures have been incorporated into this project because of the possibility that a Sonoran desert tortoise may be

impacted if it ventures within the project area during construction. The Proposed Action would not result in the loss of any population of sensitive or special status wildlife that would jeopardize the continued existence of that population or result in the species being listed or proposed for listing as endangered or threatened. Construction of the line and one new road and access road improvements would not result in the local loss of wildlife habitat, would not interfere with the movement of species for more than two reproductive seasons or nesting or breeding periods, and would not reduce the range of occurrence of any sensitive or special status wildlife species.

Birds Protected Under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. Short-term impacts to migratory birds from this project could include destruction of nests, disruption of normal activity patterns, and potential nest abandonment due to construction activities and clearing of vegetation. Potential long-term impacts include conversion of habitat to roads and death by impacts with transmission lines or electrocution. The transmission line would be designed to conform with Western's Avian Protection Plan to minimize collisions and electrocution of birds. The Proposed Action would not result in a local loss of migratory bird habitat or the loss to any population of migratory birds that would jeopardize the continued existence of that population. It would not interfere with migratory bird species movement for more than two reproductive seasons or interfere with their nesting or breeding periods, and would not reduce the range of occurrence of any migratory bird species.

Fish Habitat. No construction would occur in the Bill Williams River. Portions of the Bill Williams River would likely be used by all-terrain vehicles (ATV) to transport work crews during this project; however, large equipment would not enter the river. ATV use in the river could decrease fish habitat by increasing siltation or by modifying the streambed. The project would not alter the flow regimes of the river. The resource protection measures and Western's Construction Standards 13 and standard mitigation measures would reduce the potential for fluids or materials to enter aquatic systems. The Proposed Action would not result in the loss of individuals of a population of aquatic species that would result in the species being listed because of the limited potential for impacts to aquatic resources. Additionally, the Proposed Action would not interfere with movement of native fish for more than two reproductive seasons because construction is anticipated to be completed in less than one year.

Wild Horse/Burros. Impacts to wild horses/burros may include temporary disturbance or change in use patterns resulting from construction activities and noise. Short-term disturbances may include a short-term and/or long-term loss of forage at sites that are cleared or roads that are improved for construction activities. The project would not install any fences or barriers that would potentially interfere with the movement or reduce the range of wild horses/burros. Construction of the line and one new road and access road improvements would not result in the local loss of wild horse/burro habitat, would not interfere with the movement of wild horses/burros for more than two reproductive seasons or breeding periods, and would not reduce the range of occurrence of wild horses/burros.

Based on the above findings, Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to biological resources.

Soils. Impacts to soils would be minor and would include removal or relocation of topsoil from disturbed areas and excavated soils from drill augers at pole sites. Except for Structures 4/4 to 4/6, the new structures would be installed in the vicinity of existing structures where soils are stable and do not exhibit substantial changes in slope stability due to soil corrosion, compressibility, or expansion. Only one new access road would be constructed in a previously undisturbed area. Avoidance measures would be implemented in the vicinity of Structure 4/4, and hydric soils would not be impacted. The Proposed Action would disturb more than one acre and would require an Arizona Pollutant Discharge Elimination Systems (AZPDES) permit and a Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP). Erosion-control measures would be implemented as a component of the SWPPP, and site specific measures would be implemented to minimize and prevent soil erosion at all disturbed areas. The SWPPP would include a revegetation plan requiring 70 percent of the disturbed vegetation to return to preconstruction conditions before erosion-control monitoring ceases. With the implementation of the SWPPP, the Proposed Action would not increase the probability of slope failures, slumps, and rockfalls; soil loss or erosion would not cause rills and/or gullies to form; and sediment would not be deposited in down gradient lands or water bodies such that existing uses could not be maintained. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to soils.

Water Resources.

Floodplains. The EA includes a floodplain and wetland assessment, as required by the DOE Floodplain/Wetlands Environmental Review Requirements (10 CFR part 1022). The assessment is included as an analysis under Section 3.6 Water Resources which describes the affected environment and the environmental consequences.

> **Floodplain Statement of Findings.** The 100-year floodplain in the project vicinity is located along the Colorado River, the Bill Williams River, and various tributaries of the Bill Williams River. Buckskin Tap is located east of the Colorado River; no work would occur in the vicinity of the river. The floodplain surrounding the Bill Williams River generally occurs north of the transmission line. None of the existing structures and no new structures would occur within the delineated boundary of the 100-year floodplain. However, existing access roads to the transmission line cross 100-year floodplains. The roads are existing facilities that may require minor improvements to ensure construction vehicles have safe and reliable access to the transmission line. Improvements to access roads would be minor, involving grading and the installation of CMPs to maintain stormwater flows in washes. No CMPs would be installed in a 100-year floodplain. Access road improvements would not modify the floodplain, adversely affect the flood-carrying capacity of the floodplain, the pattern or magnitude of the flood flow, or increase scouring during a flood event. Western has determined that the Proposed Action conforms to applicable floodplain protection standards.

Water Quality, Drinking, Surface, or Ground Water. Vegetation clearing and grading for access roads could affect surface water quality because of the increased chance of sediment-laden stormwater being transported offsite to downstream drainages. Because the Proposed Action would generate greater than one acre of disturbance, the project would require an

AZPDES permit, and erosion-control measures would be installed and maintained to minimize and/or eliminate erosion and sediment loading in stormwater before, during, and after construction. No long-term degradation of water quality is anticipated because revegetation would stabilize soils and increase on-site stormwater infiltration preventing sediments from leaving the disturbance areas. Thus, construction pollutants such as sediments are not anticipated to reach the Bill Williams River, and designated uses of the river would not be affected. No long-term loss of human use or use by aquatic wildlife and vegetation is anticipated to occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

The Bill Williams River between Alamo Dam and Castenada Wash is on the Arizona 2006/2008 list of Section 303(d) impaired waters due to the presence of ammonia, low-dissolved oxygen, and elevated pH levels. The impaired reach of the Bill Williams River is approximately 7.25 stream miles upstream from the transmission line. No work within the impaired reach of the Bill Williams River is expected to occur. Daily construction access is not expected to occur via the Planet Ranch Road where the Bill Williams River is impaired, and no road improvements have been identified. Thus, the project would not contribute to the impairment of the Bill Williams River and the project would not violate state water quality standards.

Most construction access to the north side of the Bill Williams River would occur via a ford across a portion of the river that is not impaired. Construction access to the north side of the river would be via ATVs carrying construction crews and fuel for construction equipment stored in secondary leak-proof containers. Generally, the river would be crossed by ATVs twice per day until construction on the north side of the river is complete, though daily crossings may occur more frequently if additional fuel is required. ATVs could briefly increase temporary sediment turbidity when crossing the river. However, the increase would be minor relative to the entire drainage system and is not expected to affect water quality.

Although the project may use local water sources for dust control, effects to instream flows in the Bill Williams River would be minor. Water used for dust control would be limited to the amount necessary to abate dust, and dust control would be a temporary operation during construction only. Thus, no long-term effects to instream flows would occur.

The Proposed Action is not expected to degrade drinking water sources or impact surface-water rights on the Colorado River and Bill Williams River and/or downstream watercourses. The project would prevent water pollution through implementation of a SWPPP. Water for dust control may come from outside sources or local sources on the BWRNWR, such as a well or from river flows if permission is granted by the USFWS. Therefore, no long-term effects to water quality or water rights would occur.

Given the varying depths of groundwater in time and space along the transmission line, drilling for new structures may hit groundwater, particularly in the Mosquito Flats region where the transmission line would be rerouted. However, it is not expected that drilling the structure holes would contaminate groundwater such that the quality of water would exceed Federal or state standards because unsuitable materials are not expected to be used in stabilization of pole structures. The Proposed Action would not cause groundwater depletion or interference with groundwater recharge that adversely affects existing or proposed uses of the groundwater aquifer.

Waters of the U.S. Western discussed the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 404 permitting requirements for the project with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps). Impacts to ephemeral drainages would require a non-notifying Nationwide Permit (NWP) 14 because

impacts at each drainage crossing would not exceed 0.10 acre of permanent impact. Construction personnel would be required to adhere to the conditions of NWP 14 during construction to ensure that impacts to waters of the U.S. are minimized to the maximum extent possible. A CWA Section 404 permit would not be required for activities in the vicinity of Structure 4/4 because avoidance measures would be implemented, the wetland would be protected in place, and no discharge of dredge or fill material would occur in jurisdictional wetlands. A SWPPP would be prepared and implemented for erosion control to minimize surface water quality impacts and prevent violation of Section 401 of the CWA. Western and APS would comply with the State of Arizona 401 Water Quality Conditions for non-tribal waters. Conditional Section 401 water quality certification applies to the Proposed Action. Individual certification is not required, and no certification application would be submitted to the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

Wetlands/Riparian Zones. The presence of wetlands along the transmission line was evaluated, and potential wetlands associated with the Bill Williams River were identified at Structure 4/4. A wetland determination in the vicinity of Structure 4/4 using the *Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual* (1987) and the 2008 *Regional Supplement to the Corps of Engineers Wetland Delineation Manual: Arid West Region (Version 2.0)* was conducted on October 20, 2009. A 0.46-acre patch of jurisdictional wetland was identified approximately 13 feet north and east of Structure 4/4. On March 15, 2010, the Corps concurred with the wetland determination prepared for the project and agreed that 0.46 acre of wetlands occur in the vicinity of Structure 4/4, though no wetlands occur within the footprint of the structure. On March 18, 2010, the Corps concurred that no impacts to wetlands would occur if the avoidance measures identified for the project are implemented.

Riparian vegetation removal would be required in the Mosquito Flats area but would be limited to what is required to remove the existing transmission line and construct the rerouted line near the road, away from the riparian zone. Riparian vegetation removal would have a short-term negative impact because of the minor loss of riparian canopy. However, the relocation of the transmission line away from the wetland and outside the riparian zone would eliminate any future impacts to wetlands from maintenance activities, costs associated with implementing wetland avoidance measures at Structure 4/4, and regular trimming of the existing riparian vegetation thereby allowing vegetation in this area to reach maturity. Furthermore, because the project would implement a SWPPP to protect water quality and would not generate long-term effects to instream flows, the project is not expected to generate indirect loss of wetlands or riparian areas in the project area. Thus, no direct or indirect loss of wetlands or riparian areas would occur as a result of the Proposed Action.

Based on the above findings, Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to water resources.

Cultural Resources. Four cultural resource surveys identified 10 prehistoric and historic-period cultural properties in the project area. Four sites are eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Under the Proposed Action, there would be no damage or loss of a site of archaeological, tribal, or historical value that is listed, or eligible for listing, in the NRHP. Western has determined the Proposed Action will have no adverse affect on historic properties. The Arizona SHPO concurred with Western's determinations of eligibility and

finding of no adverse effect on March 23, 2010. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to cultural resources.

Native American Spiritual Concerns. Western addressed concerns by Indian tribes received during the on-going consultation process. Two tribal governments concurred with Western's finding of no adverse effect on historic properties, three provided comments, and two tribal governments have not responded. The Proposed Action would not lead to the loss, destruction or inaccessibility of a traditional cultural property or a sacred site. Human remains would not be disturbed. The Proposed Action would not have an unmitigated adverse effect to traditional cultural properties. The resource protection measures for cultural resources would be implemented to minimize construction impacts to archaeological sites. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to Native American spiritual concerns.

Public Health and Safety. Due to the rugged terrain and remote nature of the project area, potential impacts to public health and safety would remain minimal. Nevertheless, specific actions have been identified for implementation during construction so the Proposed Action would not result in serious injuries to visitors to the area or interfere with emergency response capabilities or resources. During construction, standard health and safety practices would be conducted following Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) policies and procedures. The Proposed Action is not expected to result in serious injuries to workers or create worker health hazards beyond limits set by health and safety regulatory agencies or that endanger human life and/or property. The upgraded line would reduce the potential hazards from broken poles and downed power lines, reduce climbing hazards due to cracked and rotted structures, and reduce safety hazards from wood crossarm failure, thereby benefiting the public and the workers. Population density in the project area is low, and few if any individuals would experience long-term exposure to electric and magnetic fields (EMF). The electric field would remain at a level that is below recommended levels of exposure for any of the governmental or non-governmental organizations involved in EMF studies. The magnetic field would increase under the Proposed Action due to the increase in the size of the conductor. Even with the larger magnetic field inherent to a larger diameter conductor, the EMF would still be below recommended levels of exposure. Due to the rugged topography and low population in the vicinity of the transmission line, there are no sensitive land uses such as schools and hospitals, emergency communications, or electronic health/safety devices close to the infrastructure that would be affected by implementing the Proposed Action. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not create electric and magnetic fields that would pose a plausible risk to human health. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to public health and safety.

Noise. No hospitals or schools are located in or adjacent to the project area. The Hillside Bay Mobile Home Park subdivision is the nearest sensitive receiver. It is located adjacent to the Buckskin Tap and is less than 0.1 mile from the transmission line. A field measurement for the peak noise level associated with a typical implosive connector installation is approximately 118 to 122 dBA at 200 feet. The impulse sound level for the nearest sensitive receivers would be less than the OSHA threshold of 140 dBA. Overall, noise from construction activities would generally be short term in nature and often intermittent. No sensitive receptors would be

exposed to harmful noise levels. Western has determined that no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant noise impacts would occur from the Proposed Action.

Solid Waste and Hazardous Materials. Western would require that construction crews handle hazardous materials and solid wastes in accordance with Federal, state, and local laws. All solid waste and hazardous materials generated from the Proposed Action would be properly disposed of, including recycling the existing conductor and wood poles. No measurable effect from hazardous materials and solid waste is expected with implementation of the Proposed Action. There are no materials spills response plans or emergency evacuation plans that would be impacted by the Proposed Action. Therefore, the Proposed Action would not pose a threat to public health or the environment in the project area. Western has determined that no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impact from solid waste and hazardous materials would occur from the Proposed Action.

Fuels/Fire Management. The inclusion of lightning protection for the conductor, as well as for individual structures, and the change from wood to metal structures in the Proposed Action would reduce the risk of fire ignition caused by lightning strikes. Although some clearing would occur, overall fuel levels after the project is complete would be similar to current conditions; therefore, no measurable effect from fuels or fire management is expected from implementation of the Proposed Action. Vegetation removal would be minimized, and the Proposed Action would not alter vegetative cover to the degree that condition classes identified in BLM's LHFORMP would change nor would it inhibit management response or treatments to prevent wildfire. The addition of lightning protection and the change to steel structures would reduce the potential for wildfires. Western has determined that the Proposed Action would not cause a significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impact to fuels and fire management.

Energy Policy. The new transmission line would be constructed of new materials that would improve the efficiency, reliability and safety of transmitting energy generated at Parker Dam to customers both north and east of Parker, Arizona, and those more distant in the power region. The Proposed Action would improve the efficient use of energy and would not pose a threat to public safety or serious risks to the environment. Western has concluded that no direct, indirect or cumulative significant detrimental impact to energy policy would occur from the Proposed Action, and in fact, a significant beneficial impact would occur.

Intentional Destructive Acts. Possible intentional destructive acts could vary from ordinary vandalism, such as people using firearms to shoot insulators, to a pre-meditated attempt to destroy one or more transmission structures with explosives, or an intentionally set wildfire intended to damage the transmission line infrastructure or to disrupt service to electrical customers, rather than to cause any environmental contamination. Intentional destructive acts committed on the Parker–Planet Tap 69-kV Transmission Line would potentially interrupt service to the power grid from the Parker Substation to Planet Tap and beyond to Bagdad. The redundant nature of the power grid would prevent service interruptions. Interrupted electrical service by itself would not likely have any adverse effects to the environment. Due to the ruggedness, remoteness, and inaccessibility of most of the transmission line, the potential for intentional destructive acts is low.

Determination – The analyses contained in the EA indicate that the Proposed Action, implemented with the resource protection measures, is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Western has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Issued:

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