

Scoping Report

Grand Coulee-Creston Transmission Line Rebuild Project

April 2013

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1. Introduction

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) conducted three public scoping meetings to obtain input about and assess the potential social, economic, and environmental effects of the proposed Grand Coulee-Creston No. 1 Transmission Line Rebuild project (the project or Proposed Action). Over the next three years, BPA employees or contractors will be conducting field activities in support of the environmental review process. BPA will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assess the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action and identify ways to reduce those impacts.

An EA is prepared when significant environmental impacts are not anticipated or when there is a question as to the extent of the potential impacts. If the assessment confirms that the Proposed Action will have no significant impacts, a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) will be prepared; if there are likely to be significant impacts, a more detailed analysis process will be performed and findings will be documented in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

1.1 Background Information

BPA is proposing to rebuild nearly 28 miles of the Grand Coulee-Creston No. 1 115-kV transmission line between the cities of Coulee Dam in Grant County and Creston in Lincoln County, Washington. The existing line was built in 1941 and is in need of replacement due to age, rot, and deterioration. Rebuilding the line would help maintain reliable electrical service and avoid risks to the safety of the public and maintenance crews.

The proposed project would include replacing all wood pole structures (including poles, cross arms, cross braces, guys, anchors and insulator assemblies) and conductor (including groundwire and fiber communications), improving existing access roads, and developing temporary access roads. The rebuilt line would continue to operate at 115 kV. The rebuilt transmission line would be built with the same structure locations and similar pole heights as the existing line.

BPA will prepare an EA to assist in understanding the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. The EA will analyze the Proposed Action and a No Action Alternative, which assumes that the proposed project would not be constructed. The EA will describe the existing environment, anticipated impacts to natural and human resources, and mitigation measures to avoid or minimize impacts. During this process, BPA will be working with federal, state, and local agencies; landowners; interest groups; and tribes.

1.2 Purpose of Scoping

Under the NEPA, all federal agencies are mandated to consider environmental impacts for all federal government agency decision making. The NEPA requires federal agencies to cooperate with other federal agencies and with state and local governments, and to involve public stakeholders or citizens. An early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying significant and non-significant issues related to the Proposed Action is required, known as ‘scoping’.

All persons and organizations with a potential interest in the Proposed Action, including federal, state, and local agencies; appropriate federally-recognized Indian tribes; interested stakeholders; and minority, low-income, or disadvantaged populations are solicited to participate in the NEPA environmental analysis process.

Throughout this process, the public can obtain information about the status and progress of the Grand Coulee-Creston Transmission Line Rebuild project by visiting the project website: www.bpa.gov/goto/CouleeCrestonRebuild or by contacting Andrew M. Montano, Environmental Project Manager, Bonneville Power Administration - KEC-4, P.O. Box 3621, Portland, Oregon, 97208-3621; direct telephone number 503-230-4145; toll-free telephone number 1-800-282-3713; fax number 503-230-5699; or e-mail ammontano@bpa.gov.

2. Scoping

2.1 Scoping Period

The scoping comment period for the project began with the first letter to the public dated December 14, 2012. The letter contained basic information about the project and an invitation to attend the public meetings. Initially, only two public meetings were planned for early January 2013. After the December letter was distributed, BPA identified additional potentially interested landowners in the project area who were not included on the original mailing list. As a result, BPA sent out a second public letter to the newly-identified individuals on February 25, 2013, hosted an additional public meeting in March, and extended the comment period to March 27, 2013.

2.2 Scoping Meetings

BPA held three separate scoping meetings in the project vicinity to give the public the opportunity to provide comments regarding the scope of the EA. The dates and locations of the meetings are listed below:

- January 9, 2013 – Coulee Dam, WA
- January 10, 2013 – Wilbur, WA
- March 13, 2013 – Wilbur, WA

No formal presentations were given at the meetings. BPA staff members were available to provide information, answer questions, and accept oral and written comments. Comment cards were provided during the meetings.

3. Comments

Comments could be submitted in any of the following ways:

- Speaking at the scoping meetings
- By comment card provided during the scoping meetings
- By telephone: 1-800-622-4519
- By fax: 503-230-4019
- On line: www.bpa.gov/comment
- By letter: Bonneville Power Administration – KEC - 4, PO Box 3621, Portland, OR 97208-3621

Three agencies provided comments on the project: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Washington State Department of Ecology, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. One private entity, Inland Power and Light Company, submitted comments with the remaining comments submitted by the public.

A total of 33 comments were obtained on a range of issues, the majority addressing private land issues. The comments received during this scoping process will be considered and addressed in the Preliminary EA. These comments were categorized by technical resource so that they could be addressed by the appropriate expert in each resource area as the EA is developed.

The following sections summarize the comments by EA section or issue. It should be noted that the comments are not presented verbatim. Comments have been summarized or rephrased as appropriate. All comments received have been posted in their entirety on the Grand Coulee-Creston Transmission Line Rebuild project comments page: www.bpa.gov/comment.

3.1 Reliability and Safety

- The project would support reliability and efficient transmission service in Lincoln and Spokane Counties.
- The project would benefit the entire north half of Lincoln County and thousands of Inland Power members.
- The project would ensure the safety of personnel and the public.
- Updating transmission lines is important to prevent forest fires.

3.2 Water Quality

- Two permits are required from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: (1) Section 404 of the Clean Water Act that requires a permit prior to any discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the U.S. including rivers, lakes, stream and wetlands; and (2) the Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899 that requires a permit prior to any work in, over or affecting a navigable water of the U.S., which, in this case, would be the Columbia River.
- The EA should include identification, assessment, and mitigation sequencing for impacts from all aspects of the project, including the access roads and on all waterbody crossings, including all wetlands, streams, lakes and rivers.

3.3 Native Habitats and Wildlife

- Updating transmission lines is important to improve habitat.
- Include shrubs and grasses to prevent erosion and enhance wildlife easements.
- I strongly caution against destroying wildlife habitat.
- WDFW does not anticipate that there will be new or additional impacts to native habitats and wildlife as a result of rebuilding the Grand Coulee Creston 115-kV transmission line¹.
- WDFW will be reviewing the proposed EA for potential environmental impacts, any mitigation measures to avoid or minimize those impacts, and will provide additional comments if necessary.
- Use the State Environmental Protection Act mitigation process to ensure that the project adheres to requirements of the Endangered Species Act.

3.4 Socioeconomics

- The project would create business in the local community.

¹ Based on reviews of natural resources in the project area, the work already completed in 2012 on the rebuild of the Creston-Bell 115-kV line, and routine maintenance on the Grand Coulee-Bell 230-kV line.

3.5 Land Use

- The transmission line replacement should not be used as an excuse for timber harvest.
- The EA should assess ground disturbance issues involving land with Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) contracts since damage done to private property may make the property ineligible for rebidding into the program.
- Land assessed as damaged by the Farm Service Agency or Natural Resource Conservation Service is not eligible for current or future payments under the CRP.
- After receiving a full CRP payment, landowners may be required to repay for those acres of CRP land which has been damaged.
- Land disturbance and its possible ineligibility into the CRP causes a lot of unnecessary time, expense and stress for landowners.
- Please contact the Farm Service Agency and Natural Resource Conservation Services offices.
- Work crews should act responsibly by closing gates and respecting private property when carrying out surveys or construction activities to prevent livestock from escaping.
- BPA should restore all disturbed ground once the project is completed.
- Construction activities should prevent ground disturbance issues for soil quality, drainage, wildlife, water quality, conservation and the spread of weeds on private land.
- BPA has performed additional ground disturbance on land which may be outside the bounds and beyond the scope of the right-of-way easement.
- Provide notice of BPA activities to landowners prior to carrying out work on private property, including the timing and activities involved.
- Prior projects have left ruts in fields after seeding with wheat. BPA should clearly communicate when various activities would occur.
- Inform landowners when all work on private lands would be completed.
- Will BPA replace damaged culverts?
- Construction on agricultural lands should be performed during a dry period after crops have been harvested.
- Address runoff issues post construction, such as avoiding creating ruts which can lead to soil erosion.
- The land should be re-graded to its original contours to allow farming to continue in areas of disturbance and to prevent machinery tipping over.
- Removal of topsoil would hinder crop establishment in the future.
- Using dams would prevent access with farming equipment to some areas.
- BPA should provide details to landowners regarding access road construction on private land including construction dates and duration, type of work, and restoration activities.

Additional comments regarding individual landowner issues or other local issues have not been included in this scoping report because they are not specific to this project.

4. Future Public Involvement

Additional opportunities for public involvement and comment will be provided during development of the EA. Agencies and the public will be notified when the Preliminary EA is available for review and comment. Public comments can be submitted within 30 days of release of the Preliminary EA. These comments will be considered when creating the Final EA, and will be responded to and added as an appendix to the Final EA. Public comments also can be submitted within 30 days of release of the Final EA and will be considered prior to making the final decision: a FONSI or the need for an EIS. For more information on the project through its development, go to: www.bpa.gov/goto/CouleeCrestonRebuild.

