

Bonneville Power Administration
Public Meeting - Marys Peak BPA Communications Site
Participants: Michelle Whalen, Ben Younce, Maryam Habibi, et al.
Ordered by Bryan Pham (blpham@bpa.gov)
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MICHELLE WHALEN: Welcome to this public meeting to accept comment from the Marys Peak BPA Communications Site Draft Environmental Assessment.

My name is Michelle Whalen. I'm a public affairs specialist with the Bonneville Power Administration and will be facilitating today's meeting.

(Break for direction.)

MICHELLE WHALEN: Both the audio and the visual today are being recorded. That means that the verbal comments and questions you submit will also be recorded along with the questions that you type into the Q&A window. This just helps ensure that all the comments and questions we receive are accurately captured.

In a few minutes, I'll let you know how to indicate if you'd like to provide verbal comments or how to submit a question through the Q&A window for our panel of subject-matter experts to answer. But first, a quick meeting overview, and then we'll introduce who will be listening to your remarks and answering your questions today.

Here is the agenda for our meeting. We'll review the format and purpose of the meeting, then introduce the subject-matter experts from the three federal agencies. This will be followed by a 15-minute presentation of the Draft Environmental Assessment and its contents. The rest of the meeting will be devoted to listening to, recording, and responding to your comments and questions. Around 7:50 or so, we'll wrap up the meeting with closing remarks from the agencies and hear about the next steps in the public involvement process.

As you know, we're recording this meeting to be sure we've captured all your comments and questions. Meeting participants will be muted until a question is recognized by the meeting host. Later, we'll give you specific directions on how to be recognized to speak before the public comment period begins of the meeting.

Now, a little about the purpose of this meeting. We scheduled the meeting to provide opportunities for you to learn about the Draft Environmental Assessment, submit comments, and ask questions during the comment period for the Marys Peak BPA Communications Site Draft Environmental Assessment. All the comments will be posted to the project website and the final EA will include the responses to all comments we receive as well.

For those of you on the phone, I'll just say the website address out loud: www.bpa.gov/goto/MarysPeak.

Tonight, we're joined by representatives of the Bonneville Power Administration, Forest Service, and Bureau of Land Management, who are here to listen to your comments and answer your questions.

Ben Younce, project manager with Bonneville Power Administration will start introductions for the three agencies.

BEN YOUNCE: Hello, everyone. My name is Ben Younce, I'm the project manager with BPA on the Marys Peak Communications Site project.

We have a number of folks from the project team on the call this evening to help answer questions during the Q&A portion of the meeting. You can see at the top of the list, myself, Ben Younce, project manager. We have a structural engineer with us, Jim Barnhart; electrical engineer, Mike McClintock; communications planning engineer, Chris Witthaus. We have two environmental protection specialists from the project team here – Becky Hill and Kimberly St.Hilaire. We have archaeologist Kurt Perkins with us, realty specialist Harley Canaday, and from public affairs, Michelle Whalen, who you heard just moments ago.

Also, on the call are team members from the Forest Service and BLM. Michele Holman, will you please introduce those from your team today?

MICHELE HOLMAN: Good evening, everyone. Thanks for showing up and being interested in our BPA EA on Marys Peak. Marys Peak is a super special area, as everyone knows, and a lot of people are deeply connected to that area. It's important that people show up and express their comments. Thank you for that.

I am Michele Holman. I am the district ranger for the Central Coast Ranger District and the Oregon Dunes NRA. Tonight, we have with us Katie Isacksen, who's the Forest NEPA planner; Angie Morris, who is our district special uses and land program manager. We have Lisa Romano, who is our public affairs staff officer; our recreation, land, and heritage staff officer Dani Pavoni; Jeff Caswell, who is one of our civil engineers; and Zeke Langum, who is our zone engineer.

With that, I'll toss it over to Paul Tigan and let him introduce the BLM folks.

PAUL TIGAN: Hey, good evening, everyone. Paul Tigan, your BLM Marys Peak field office manager. Marys Peak field office covers Benton County, Polk County, and Lincoln County. Happy to represent the agency this evening. Stefanie Winfree, our planning and environmental coordinator, couldn't make it tonight, but I'll be happy to answer any questions you might have.

BEN YOUNCE: Excellent, thank you. Now, we'll get into the actual content of the EA. The slide you're seeing now is the table of contents for the Draft Environmental Assessment. Chapter 1's title summarizes its contents pretty well. It describes the purpose and need for BPA to upgrade its communications system at Marys Peak.

Chapter 2 describes all of the alternatives considered through the EA process. In this chapter, you'll find details for each alternative, including explanations for all the alternatives that were considered, but eliminated during the process as well.

Chapters 3 and 4 contain all of the environmental aspects for each of the alternatives considered in the EA. This includes the anticipated impacts and the identified mitigation measures for each alternative, as well as all the environmental consultations and permitting requirements for each.

Chapter 5 lists all the concerned stakeholders who will be receiving this EA and Chapter 6, 7, and the Appendices contain supporting information to the previous chapters in the EA.

Good, thank you, you moved the slide without even asking – well-oiled machine. Chapter 1, the purpose and the need for the upgrade at Marys Peak. The driver for the need to upgrade the VHF equipment at Marys Peak is safety. Safety for the transmission line and field workers who respond to outages and

perform maintenance on the transmission lines, as well as safety for the public by minimizing the duration of outages.

As we all appreciate here, in the Northwest, we have beautiful terrain full of mountains, hills, and trees, and often, BPA's line workers and field personnel spend their workdays out in that terrain. While it's beautiful, this terrain makes regular communications difficult. The most important safety tool that we have to ensure that everyone gets to go home at the end of the day and that the lights stay on for all of our customers is radio communication.

We never want to energize a line until we have 100% positive confirmation that it's absolutely safe to do so. Having a reliable communication system that allows our workers in the field to connect back with the control centers ensures the safety of the people working near the energized lines, and also increases our efficiency when restoring those lines during outages.

(Break for direction.)

Unfortunately, BPA's existing communications equipment is aging. Many of the parts are now discontinued by the manufacturer. Some of the radios on our system were installed in the 1980s, and those older radios are failing, and replacement parts are becoming more and more difficult to acquire. As a result of the aging system and BPA's reliance on it for safety, BPA has implemented a program to upgrade our entire VHF communications system across all of BPA's service territory.

One of those sites with the aging communication equipment that needs to be replaced is Marys Peak. In order to ensure public safety and the safety of BPA personnel, BPA needs to upgrade its existing communication equipment to a reliable system that can be maintained for years to come.

Before we move on from this slide, I just want to bring your attention to the two cartoon pictures at the bottom-right-hand side of the slide. This should help provide some context for the upcoming slides. These pictures describe how the communications system connects a worker in the field back to the control centers. You'll note there is a little stick figure guy who's near a transmission line that has a tree fell on it. That field worker is using a handheld radio to communicate back to a building on a hillside over VHF communication using the little handset. From building to building, that audio gets passed via microwave paths from radio to radio, building to building, back to the control centers. The same works in reverse for the second picture you see there, where it's the outbound audio from the dispatcher.

Either way, to get communications back and forth from a person out in the middle of nowhere with trees and hills around them. They communicate to a local building over VHF and the building-to-building communication over microwave gets us back to our control center. Next slide, please.

On to Chapter 2. Chapter 2 describes all of the alternatives considered through the EA process. In this chapter, you can find the details for the No Action Alternative and the Three Action Alternatives proposed in the EA. It also contains details and the reasoning for all the alternatives that were considered but eliminated during this process. Also, contains the criteria used to evaluate all of the alternatives. Next slide.

This slide is presenting the No Action Alternative and the Three Action Alternatives presented in the EA. Please take note of the map on the right-hand slide of this slide. Note the color-code microwave radio paths. Back a few previous slides when we were noting the stick figure and the signal was going from building to building back to the control centers, that's what these lines on the slide are indicating.

(Break for direction.)

Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative. In this alternative, BPA would stay in our existing building with our existing equipment and make no changes as part of this project. BPA would continue to use, maintain, and operate as we have been.

(Break for direction.)

Alternative 2A is the blue line from Marys Peak to Albany Substation. In this alternative, BPA would stay at the existing BPA Communications Site with a new microwave path out to Albany Substation.

Alternative 3C is indicated with the red line right next to the blue line. In Alternative 3C, BPA would co-locate, still on Marys Peak summit, in the U.S. Forest Service Building. There would be an addition put onto the U.S. Forest Service Building that BPA would move into. That would also include a microwave path from Marys Peak to Albany Substation.

Alternative 4 is the yellow path that you see on the map there. This is at the West Point Spur location, just to the west and slightly lower than the Marys Peak summit. At that location, BPA would co-locate with Consumer Powers, Inc., and it would include a new microwave path out to Prospect Hill Communications Site.

A summary for all these impacts can be found further into Chapter 2.

On to Chapter 3. On the line, we have our environmental protection specialist, Becky Hill, who is going to take us through the environmental aspects of the EA from here forward. Becky? The floor is yours.

BECKY HILL: Awesome, thanks, Ben. Chapter 3 provides analyses of the potential impacts for implementing the project's Action Alternatives as well as the No-Action Alternative. The natural and human resources that could be affected by the projects listed on the right-hand side of your screen, with their corresponding section numbers, and for each of those resources, Chapter 3 described the existing resource conditions that could be affected by the project, which are also known as the affected environment.

For example, BPA conducted wildlife and vegetation surveys and performed cultural resource surveys to document the existing resource conditions in the project's study area. Chapter 3 also describes the potential impacts to each of those resources. The potential impacts also known as the "environmental consequences" are again described for the No-Action Alternatives, as well as the three Action Alternatives. Finally, for each of those resources, the proposed mitigation measures that would be implemented are described in Chapter 3. Mitigation measures include standard construction best practices, as well as site-specific measures with the intent of reducing potential resource impacts to the smallest level possible when feasible.

Each resource section follows in the same sequence as describing the study area first, then the affected environment, then the potential impact to the resource by alternatives, and then the proposed mitigation measures. Next slide please.

If you're interested in reading about the statutes, implementing regulations, and executive orders that could apply to this project, you would want to investigate chapter 4. For example, readers can find information on the EA's preparation pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act implementing regulations, pre-consultation efforts for the Endangered Species Act, Federal Lands Policy Management Act, and other applicable statutes and regulations in this chapter.

Chapter 5 was the federal and state agencies, tribes, and other groups that are receiving this Environmental Assessment, and glossary and references are found in Chapters 6 and 7.

Here, we have the Appendices to the Environmental Assessment. Appendix A and C describe the special status-plants, fungi, and wildlife species that have the potential to occur in the project study area and were surveyed for, while Appendices B and D list all the species that were actually documented in the study area during the surveys.

Appendix E provides visual comparisons of the existing site conditions, versus the simulated conditions for each Action Alternative. For example, a view from the picnic table at the Marys Peak summit is Key Viewing Area #9, and on pages E7, 8, and 9 of Appendix E, you can visually compare and contrast what it would look like had you been sitting there at the picnic table and Alternative 2A, 3C, or 4 was implemented. You could compare and contrast the current conditions with what the site could look like.

For additional information on the vegetation surveys that were performed and the scenic resources analysis that were used to develop this EA, please visit the project website, as those resource reports have been posted there. Next slide.

MICHELLE WHALEN: Thank you, Ben and Becky. Now, it's time to take comments and answer questions. I'm going to hand things over to Maryam Habibi, who will facilitate our Q&A session.

MARYAM HABIBI: Hi there. Thank you, Michelle. My name is Maryam Habibi. I work for Bonneville Power Administration in the Communications Department. I'm going to help facilitate the comment and question portion of this meeting. We're looking forward to hearing your comments and answering your questions.

I'd like to remind everybody that this meeting is being recorded, and any comments or questions you provide during the meeting will be heard by all of the attendees, and eventually posted to the project website.

There are two ways to submit comments or ask a question during this meeting. For method one, you may choose to use the raised-hand method. The panelists and I will be able to see these raised hands and will take your comments or questions in the order received.

We ask that you please limit your verbal comments to two minutes, and we will let you know if you approach your allotted time. Once I acknowledge a raised hand and we unmute a speaker, all attendees and panelists will be able to hear you. Your line will stay unmuted during the panelists' response to your question or comment to allow for any follow-up or clarifying questions. Once your comment is complete or your question has been answered, we will re-mute your line and ask you to lower your hand.

For method two, you may also choose to use the Q&A box to submit a written question or comment. Either I as the host or one of the panelists will take these questions and comments as they come in, or as appropriate during the meeting.

Your submission will be read aloud and then a designated panelist either from BPA, U.S. Forest Service, or Bureau of Land Management will answer or address the submission for all to hear, and in some cases we may respond in writing in the Q&A box as well.

Before we begin, it looks like we have a few questions in the Q&A box right now, but I don't currently see any hands raised. We'll take the first question from the Q&A box: All alternatives assume VHF radio

communications. Have you considered dumping that technology and using SatComs? Voice sat phones are presumably expensive, but a text-based system like Garmin inReach might make sense.

BEN YOUNCE: Hi, this is Ben Younce. Yes, thanks for that question. In fact, yes, we have considered sat phones. You can find that in the EA under Section 2.10.9 titled Use of Satellite Phone.

To summarize it for you, what we found is that while it can be used as a backup means of communication, it doesn't provide BPA the reliability compared to our VHF radio system. These factors, in conjunction with the limited effectiveness of satellite phones when we get under tree cover and loss of coverage, depending on the position of the satellites in relation to the terrain. Sometimes, time of day can make a difference. That was the biggest reason why we couldn't go strictly to the satellite phones. We still use them as a backup method. Thank you.

MARYAM HABIBI: Thank you.

CHRIS WITTHAUS: I'm sorry this is Chris Witthaus in Planning. There are a couple of other items associated with sat phones that make it a challenge. One is that voice recognition of the user of the sat phone is very difficult. So, when communicating between a dispatcher and the person at the end, a lot of times the voice is garbled, and we have quite a bit of experience with that. It's made it difficult to have reliable communications because of that as well.

During a crisis, commercial satellite gets congested. When we need our communications the most, when it's the most critical, the sat phones get congested, then we're unable to use them for our most critical operation. Thank you.

MARYAM HABIBI: I don't currently see any hands raised and we don't have any other questions in the queue in the Q&A section. We'll wait a moment to see if any other questions come in.

We have one. This is from the Q&A box: Alternative 4 would add a dish and antennas. Future projects to reconnect the West Point Meadow to the main Marys Peak Meadow Complex would expose facilities to views from the summit. The additional equipment would impact visual quality if invading trees are removed.

BECKY HILL: I'm sorry, I was looking for a section of the EA, would you like to take this one?

BEN YOUNCE: Actually, no, please, if you would, since it's the impact to the trees and the environment as well. I think you would be better.

BECKY HILL: Sounds great. Thanks for the statement, Cynthia. As far as future projects to reconnect the meadow to the main meadow, I know that may be an agenda item for the Forest Service and others, but as far as this project goes, we have analyzed the scenic resources impacts for Alternative 4 and what the addition of the dish and the antennas would add to the existing tower. The tower elevation would not be raised, it would just be an addition of the dish and the antennas.

In Appendix E, you can see what the visual impacts would be if you were standing on the summit. Key Viewing Area 13 shows what that would look like from standing at the summit, the addition of the new equipment, and also when driving on Marys Peak Road on the north side of West Point Spur, headed to the summit, we have the analysis done to see what would it look like with the trees being removed from that north area of West Point Spur. Because the trees are interspersed within an existing stand, the visual impacts would be minimal.

KIMBERLY ST.HILAIRE: Becky, this is Kimberly. Just to add to that, we didn't analyze the effect of this future project on the visual resources from the summit. It wasn't considered. I don't think it was really brought up. This is good information to have. I don't know how certain this project is or if there are plans or if it's kind of a hope that in the future those meadows will be reconnected, but it's good to know. I appreciate you bringing that up, and I think I'll take it back to our visual specialist and also to the Forest Service landscape architects who are visual specialists and we'll talk this over, because that's something we didn't really consider in this draft EA. Thanks for bringing it up.

MARYAM HABIBI: All right, for the next question, we have: What will prevent you from using Option 4?

BEN YOUNCE: Hello, this is Ben again. Thanks for the question. Alternative 4 is a viable alternative. In fact, any of the ones proposed in the EA are viable. There is nothing that would be preventing us. It has pros and cons, like all of them do. There is nothing in particular preventing us from going ahead with Alternative 4.

What I will say to that end, the preferred alternative, BPA's preferred alternative, after having gone through this EA process and done the public scoping previously and saw the comments there is Alternative 3C, to co-locate with the U.S. Forest Service and their building on the summit. That also hasn't been decided yet. We still have this public comment period, and we want to take these comments into consideration. Alternative 4 is still viable. Thank you.

MARYAM HABIBI: Our next question is: What precautions have been considered for rare species atop Marys Peak?

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: Maybe I can ask Kathleen for clarification, if she's focused either on rare plant species or rare wildlife species or just rare species in general. I'm not seeing any or hearing any clarification.

BEN YOUNCE: I'm wondering if it's possible if James West, our host, could unmute Kathleen, she'd be willing to speak to the clarifications.

(Break for direction.)

JAMES WEST: Kathleen, you've been unmuted.

KATHLEEN: Thank you. I was mostly concerned about rare plant species atop Marys Peak.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: I can take that, Kathleen. First, I'm going to remind you that the whole survey report for the vegetation, which took place in both 2017 and 2018 is on the project website. If you have a special interest in what we found up there and what we considered, that would be a great resource for you. I know we have among our stakeholders a lot of people with a lot of expertise in certain areas, and we have some really talented botanists who may be really interested in this.

We did survey for sensitive, and Forest Sensitive, and also federally listed species. We did not find any. We didn't find those particular species, but I do know, that the concept of rare species that you're speaking of probably goes beyond the ones that are on special status species lists, because a lot of the species on Marys Peak are, indeed, rather unusual occurrences and people might consider them rare.

Basically, for vegetation, we are considering all of the vegetation at Marys Peak really important and having a lot of precautions in terms of minimizing any impacts to vegetation that are not strictly necessary, keeping workers and equipment out of areas, restricting routes of access, all those things.

In the vegetation section of the EA, you'll find a long list of mitigations. One of our biggest threats that we considered was weeds, because that's probably one of the worst impacts to habitat, were we to introduce or spread weed species in habitat that's pretty good. A lot of the habitat is fairly nice, even along the roads. Take a look at the mitigation measures, and we would appreciate any comments that you have on those. Even though they may not be on a special status list, when you see things like the penstemons and the phlox and Indian paintbrushes, and the things that we don't encounter in the valley with great, very regularly, they are really special species that we're really concerned about.

Also, right now, one thing we're working on is we're developing a revegetation plan that will be a standalone plan that we would be glad to share with you once we get that drafted probably later this year.

The restoration services team, they're a Forest Service group that focuses on restoration. They did the surveys, so they know the habitats that would be impacted, and they are developing a revegetation plan. This past summer, they went up and did collection because all revegetation would be done with plant propagules that come from Marys Peak. We wouldn't be introducing anything. They have various lists for the various types of impact areas such as the summit or the water bar areas. They've either got the seed that they've got or that they've collected because they would plant a seed, or they're actually going to grow out quite a bit.

I just looked at the list of flowering plants called forbs that's the general category for flowering plants, right before the meeting, and I was pretty impressed at the diversity and the number of forbs that they're planning to grow out for the summit. They've got some pretty ambitious plans.

Someone during scoping, it might have been you, Kathleen, mentioned concern about a viola – a violet species that was on the summit they felt like and it just hasn't been seen. I believe that was *Viola adunca*. I asked Matt Smith, the botanist. They actually went up and collected *Viola adunca* at West Point Spur by bagging the seed heads because when they disperse, they disperse explosively. They were able to catch seeds in bags. They even have *Viola adunca*, which had been a request for seeding. That's a whole other topic, but we will put the vegetation plan on the website and welcome your comments. If you have a special interest in that, feel free to call me. My contact number is on the website and on the letter that went out. We'll let Marys Peak Alliance know when it's up on the website, and we would welcome your comments, because I'm sure it would be improved with comments of the people who know the area so well. We're more than glad to work with you on that.

MARYAM HABIBI: All right. Thank you very much. Our next question comes from David Eckert (ph.).

(Break for direction.)

DAVID ECKERT (QUESTION): I would like to expand on my previous question about what would prevent you from using Option 4. I appreciate the answer that you gave already, Ben. In thinking about this, even though I'm sure there's no question that the summit of Marys Peak is the most advantageous for the signal for a nice, clean signal going pretty much everywhere from the highest peak. There are a couple negatives to the summit. One is the extremely harsh weather that is in the top 200 feet. Since the summit is approximately 200 feet higher than West Point, there is really a marked difference in the wind, the precipitation, the snow – everything about it, the impacts over time that can happen and with climate change even get worse. That's one thing.

The second part of that goes back to Kathleen's question. I don't think about the individual plants, what I see this as the plant communities, which are almost unique in the world. It would be hard pressed to find some communities like this, and that's been covered many times in the literature. Every time there's some construction up there and the last one was 2011, something like that, when the fence was put in. There were a lot of weeds brought up. The non-native gravels were brought up for the road and for the summit, they had a huge impact. I'm not even sure how you can restore that, to tell you the truth.

It just seems that when it gets down to the subcontractor level, everything is lost. These great plans that come out with a lot of good people doing a lot of good research are lost once it gets to the subcontractors. The oversight is close to zero on the ground. We saw that in reams back in 2011, but it's happened before also.

I really don't see how you can construct – do more construction up there, let alone deconstruction, without causing significant damage to the ecosystem because of the subcontractor issue.

Again, it just seems – since we have 100,000 people that come up there every year, you have your trucks coming up there regularly because of the weather and looking at it, that Option 4 would be by far the best to stay away from all the people, even if you have to spend a couple more bucks and have a little bit more complexities in the communication.

I can go on for an hour on that, but I'll close with that, thank you.

MARYAM HABIBI: Thank you. I see that Michele Holman, one of our panelists, has her hand raised. Did you have something to respond to in that?

MICHELE HOLMAN: Yes, thank you. I actually was just going to ask Dave to explain further his question about Alternative 4. He already did that for us. I just wanted to say, "Hi, Dave. It's good to hear your voice." Thank you for expanding on that. I was wondering kind of what was behind that question. So, thanks a lot.

DAVID ECKERT (QUESTION): You're welcome.

BEN YOUNCE: David, this is Ben Younce. I wanted to respond even just briefly. The 200-foot climate difference, that's a great consideration and is definitely a negative against being up at the summit. I'm going to ensure that gets noted down and considered when we discuss which alternative we want to go with. I know that's one that I don't believe we've considered specifically – the change in climate and then the additional burden it would take to get to there.

Yes, I guess that's the notes I have here. Thank you, and I'll take that under consideration. Also, please recall, everyone that this is being recorded and a transcription will be made after the fact. Every comment considered here, spoken here, written down here is all going to be included in the EA.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: Ben, this is Kimberly. I would like to agree with Dave, though, that projects are only as good as the implementation, and they oftentimes break down in implementation. At Bonneville, like everyone else, we've seen that. As a result, one thing that we would propose for this project, because it is such a special area, it's environmentally sensitive, but it's also a high-use recreational area, so there are public safety concerns in addition to the fragile environment.

We would have an environmental monitor on site. That would be during all ground disturbance, to ensure that the mitigation as written is actually implemented. We do create a big – it's called a mitigation implementation plan, that there's a staff member at BPA implements.

Ben, maybe what you can do is explain a little bit about the use of environmental monitors by BPA, and that might help see that a sincere effort is made to ensure that the mitigation is actually implemented.

BEN YOUNCE: Sure. Thanks, Kimberly. So, on other projects in the past, and planned for this project would be an environmental monitor who would be on site 100% of the time when any outdoor work activities would be going on. This would be someone who would be hired by BPA specifically, directly contracted from BPA, not through the prime contractor or a sub of a sub of a sub. They would be there the entire time to ensure that none of the mitigation measures are broken. We've gone through this long process, gone through the hard work of putting together this EA, and having these discussions. When it comes time to do construction, I certainly don't want our team to go and erase all of the hard work we've done to this point. We came up with the mitigation measures and we will directly contract to ensure that they get adhered to.

I realize that doesn't erase history, and history, of course, is the best predictor, but that is what we do intend to do in this project, and it's included in the EA as well. Thank you.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: Also, Dave, we welcome your careful review of the mitigation and any comments, any mitigation measures you think would help make sure that sensitive resources are protected. Please provide them in your comments.

MARYAM HABIBI: Our next question is: Who chooses the preferred alternative?

BEN YOUNCE: This is a BPA action. It would be on BPA to make that final choice in conjunction with Forest Service and BLM. It has to agree to all parties, but the end decision falls with BPA, because it's our project that's being proposed. And I'd welcome any other comments from the Forest Service or BLM.

BECKY HILL: Ben, this is Becky from the environmental team, if it's okay, I'd like to add just a little bit. Ultimately, each of the three agencies would be making their own decisions, but we're looking for feedback on this draft EA from the public to truly figure out which alternatives should become the preferred for all three agencies. We're hoping that with the close collaboration with the agencies that we've done to date, that we'll continue that collaborative working together and just working to ultimately, arrive at the same alternative to move forward as the preferred alternative for all three agencies.

Ultimately, each agency does have its own independent decision at the end of the day.

MARYAM HABIBI: Okay, thank you, guys. Our next question is a comment and a question: Bird species tend to be at the true summit, like the snow bunting pair I saw today, and the peregrine family I saw a month ago. How do the plans impact them, if at all?

BECKY HILL: Thanks for that question. This is Becky again with the environmental group. Okay, I'm just re-reading the question here. As far as wildlife concerns, there, again, we did do surveys for species of concern and documented some of the species that were observed during the surveys. I believe those were also observed during our wildlife team's time up there.

At the end of the wildlife section, we do have mitigation measures, again, that would be used during the implementation phase to ensure that we're having the least amount of impacts on wildlife species,

including birds, and those are in Section 3.6.5. They include everything from no heavy equipment in certain areas, timing restrictions for nesting birds, and there's an extensive list there.

Again, as Kimberly mentioned earlier on the vegetation mitigation measures, I would encourage folks to check out that section and let us know if there are additional mitigation measures that we should consider with the implementation phase for all wildlife, not just the birds. Thank you.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: This is Kimberly. I'd just add there's probably going to be some temporary displacement of wildlife because of noise and I think they're probably already habituated to people being up on the summit quite a bit. It would likely be the construction noise that might displace them.

There is a lot of habitat. Our actions don't cover much area. I understand the summit is of particular concern, but under all alternatives – 2A, 3C, and 4 – there would be work at the summit a lot less under Alternative 4, the removal of the existing communications site. There still would be some potential displacement of birds. But they're mobile and they will move somewhere else. I think that's pretty much a problem with any construction noise in an area that's pretty natural – though they are habituated to noise levels, at least from human presence at this point. But I don't think there's too much we can do to reduce the construction noise levels. A lot of the activities that we've got going for this project are probably going to be somewhat intermittent and move – they wouldn't be on the summit every day for five months, they'd go in and do something and there would be a pause. Maybe Ben could speak to that. I don't think it's like some construction sites like building an apartment building, where there's this constant level of noise.

MARYAM HABIBI: Our next comment is a follow-up, leveraging whatever Dave Eckert said. It would be good to specifically require that contractor vehicles be pressure washed before arriving at the job site to reduce the impact of bringing seeds from unwanted species to the peak.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: This is Kimberly again. There is a mitigation measure requiring that all equipment and vehicles be washed. I think it would be water washed, and you're recommending pressure washed. If there's a reason why you'd rather see pressure washed versus going through a water washing – like through a car wash type wash – then let us know.

But I believe the Forest Service can speak to this, but I think they plan to do some inspections of the vehicles, equipment before it enters the jobsite, but I agree, that's one of the main ways that weeds are brought in. They're also brought in on boots and clothes and construction workers' persons. So, having something to clean boots and things like that will be necessary.

ZEKE LANGUM: This is Zeke with the Forest Service. I don't know if this is listed in our mitigations, but generally, the Forest Service, we require all vehicles to be inspected for weeds before they come on site. That's usually done by the pressure washer, but we don't specify how they do it. They just have to have clean vehicles – that means no chunks of dirt or anything like that on the vehicles. If that's not in the mitigation, we should probably add that all vehicles are weed inspected before coming on site.

Then, the other one we might throw in there that we put in all our mitigations also is that any rock sources need to be state certified weed free.

MARYAM HABIBI: Thank you, Zeke. Our next question is: What are the decision criteria for each of the three agencies involved in making the final decision? When will these decision criteria be available for review?

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: Let's see. That was from Tony, was that right? That was Tony's question? Well, speaking for BPA, and Ben will likely have something to add, basically, we look at how each alternative meets the project purposes, and there's a table in Chapter 2 that has the 2.11, the comparisons of the alternatives. Section 2.11, for all alternatives, we look at how does it meet those project purposes? Does it? Are there any issues? Then, we compare the alternatives. Sometimes people ask us, "Do you choose the least cost alternative?" No, not necessarily, but it's always weighed in. I mean, we want to demonstrate cost effectiveness, but if you take a look across the alternatives, they have very similar costs. Costs would likely not be determinative on this project. Ben should probably speak a little bit to how it's weighed at the management level, but there's always a certain amount of subjectivity. The bottom line is a comparison about the project purposes and how each alternative meets it.

BEN YOUNCE: Thanks, Kimberly, this is Ben. I agree with everything. All I can add to that is, absolutely, those tables within the EA is the criteria we'll be using to make the decision. Then, in the cases of a tie, where they appear to both or multiples to be viable, it would come down to the safety of BPA personnel, what is the coverage availability, and it could be that the coverage is blacked out in a section that isn't aligned that needs maintenance or is a very small section of line as opposed to a bigger section of line.

Cost may come into the decision making, but as Kimberly said, it's not the be-all, end-all. We do have a responsibility to the rate payers of the Northwest to spend the least amount of money we can, but it isn't the beginning and the end of our decision.

And the other thing that comes into consideration is the maintenance, the ease of getting to the site, access to the site, the age of the facilities, the long-term benefits as well. Thank you.

MICHELE HOLMAN: This is Michele Holman. So, for the Forest Service, I will be the decision maker on the EA. What we do is we adopt the EA from BPA and just say the analysis is adequate and we support the process, and the analysis is good. But when it comes to choosing a decision, we don't really put together a specific criteria. We look at several things. As a decision maker, I will talk to the people that have been engaged, I will look at the purpose and need for the project and how all the alternatives meet that. We'll look at public comment, what have we heard from the public, and also, I'll look at the impact to the resources.

I take all of that in consideration. When we write a decision notice, all that rationale on why it was chosen, the decision, will be in that decision notice. In terms of ranking them and coming out with an alternative at the end that meets all these criteria and was ranked highest, you won't see that from the Forest Service because there's all kinds of things that come into consideration that it would be difficult to rank, such as public engagement and resource impact and meeting purpose and need. That's where we're coming from in the Forest Service. We will work with BPA, of course, to see if we can get in alignment on this project and choose the same alternative, because we've been working hand in hand on this. We support BPA in their actions – and BLM and we want to move forward in alignment, like I said.

With that, I will stop. Thanks.

PAUL TIGAN: Thanks, Michele, this is Paul. I'll be the decision maker for the BLM on whether to issue the permits necessary to carry out the project as it relates to BLM land. I think that part's important, too, just in terms of BLM. I wouldn't downplay us to say that we play a bit part, but BPA already has authorization to travel across BLM land in order to get to the site. That really isn't part of the decision that we're making in regards to issuing for one of the alternatives in order to have a clear view of their substation in Albany, they need a microwave beam path right of way.

Just like Michele said, we treat the NEPA the same way, we adopt it for our own use. The amount of analysis that's been done for this certainly suffices for us to make the right-of-way decision.

Honestly, because the land that's being put to use and the resources that are being impacted are more directly connected to the Forest Service, and certainly BPA, BLM is happy to support the project. I wouldn't see us as being – we've been at the table the entire time. We also just know what the size of our role is in the final decision. Thanks.

MARYAM HABIBI: Thank you, all. Currently, we do not have additional questions lined up in the queue, nor do I see hands raised. We'll just give it a minute to see if anybody else has questions.

BECKY HILL: Maryam, this is Becky Hill from environment. I do see a question here – a follow up to the one about the decision criteria for each of the three agencies. It's a question for Michele Holman. Do you consider your existing management direction for the area?

MICHELE HOLMAN: Yes. So, that's a good question. Thank you for that. So, when I talk about purpose and need for the project, that purpose and need is grounded in our management direction. So, yes, we have a lot of guidance provided in our forest plan, and we do have a Marys Peak Scenic Botanical Area Plan as well.

So, when we talk about looking at a decision, how well it fits management direction, how well it falls within the intention of the area under our Forest Plan is a big part of that decision. Yes, thank you for bringing that up. That should have been in that discussion as well.

MARYAM HABIBI: I'd like to give folks a chance to think of any other questions that they'd like to ask the panel or comments that you'd like to submit during this meeting. The panelists will stand by for a couple of minutes to see if there is anything else that comes in.

MICHELLE WHALEN: It looks like we have one more question from Dave Eckert.

MARYAM HABIBI: The question is: How do you consider the impacts of communications signals on Marys Peak visitors?

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: Ben, this is Kimberly. I would refer Dave to the Public Health and Safety chapter, which is Section 3.12. We looked at both the microwave signal and also the radio waves and have a discussion of potential impacts from those.

The main conclusion from that is that the microwave signals are very specific point-to-point, very tight beam so they're transmitted in a very directed beam. The impacts from microwave signals – microwave transmission – was considered to be none, just because, basically, people would need to stand very close or get in front of it.

VHF frequencies, which include radio waves, most of those we considered low. There is a discussion about radio waves in that chapter that talks about some of the current research. It's one of those areas where it's not completely known, and some studies do tend to contradict one another to a certain extent. The radio waves are omnidirectional, unlike the microwave, in that they radiate out into a wide area – wide direction. So, we're exposed to them all the time; we're affected by them. The studies – let's see, what section is that? I want to be careful to refer you to it. It's 3.12.2 The Health Effects of EMR section.

There have been some studies evaluating cancer risk from exposure and they usually looked at specific conditions like workers, people who work in radar facilities, or people who are heavy cell phone users.

Some of the studies conclude there's a possible carcinogenic risk to humans, others didn't see much of a risk. They found no clear increase in cancer risk for people who were working in communications areas.

We've got some pretty inconclusive results. We're one of several VHF antennas up on Marys Peak, so we did say we thought it would be a low impact on visitors and people nearby.

At Albany Substation, it would only be microwave. There would be no VHF. On the community of people who live near the Albany substation, we concluded there would be no impacts from VHF radiation, because we're not putting a VHF antenna at Albany, but we also concluded there would be no microwave impacts because it's up high, it's a directed beam, and within a gated, fenced facility. So, we concluded there would be no impacts from microwaves. I don't know, Ben, if you have anything to add to that, but yeah, I would encourage you to take a look at the public health and safety section for a little bit more information.

BEN YOUNCE: Thanks, Kimberly. I don't have anything to add; you explained that quite well. There is no one here on the call who's an expert in electromagnetic radiation and its effects on health, but we did include in the study our research that we found within the agency by those who are. Yes, please refer to that section that Kimberly led us to.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: One other thing to add is that all of these types of radiation decrease with distance, and that's one good reason to have a fence around the facility to keep people at a distance. In the past, people have gotten really close to the towers, or kids might have climbed them or whatever. It's keeping people off the communication towers is an important part of the safety strategy up there.

MARYAM HABIBI: We have another couple of questions and a comment. First, a comment: The last time water bars were improved on the access road to the summit, the meadows were impacted. This seems to be more of the same. Can we reduce the impact of water bars?

ZEKE LANGUM: This is Zeke with the Forest Service. I'm not exactly sure how the meadows were impacted the first time around; I wasn't here. But there should be a very minimal impact from the water bars this time around. They're being built a little bit stiffer, so they will less likely fail on us, and the biggest impact will be basically the energy dissipaters, which are 10 by 10 at the back end of it, which should disperse the water out. We shouldn't have a huge water impact on the meadows and kind of help that water flow out.

I'm not sure what happened last time, what you're referencing, and wasn't here, but if you have something specific, I could speak to it.

MICHELE HOLMAN: Hey, Zeke. This is Michele. I actually was here when that happened and what happens is that road up to the top, we get vegetation from the meadow that starts to come up onto the road, onto the side of the road. And there are some pretty rare plants up there. So, when we bladed that and you push that off to the side so the water could go off (inaudible) we impacted several of those plants. In fact, that's how I met Esther, is that she was really concerned about those individual plants that were impacted.

It's a real challenge up there to – managing roads without impacts is almost impossible. So, how do we understand that? How do we get the vehicles that we need to get from the parking lot up to the communications towers? Because we need access. We need to put in propane. We need to put in – we need to install – replace things. We just need to maintain that area. And the vehicles to do that are not small, typically. I think there's going to be a real challenge to manage that road as the road and minimize the impacts to that meadow. It cuts right through the meadow. That's what we're talking about, Zeke, is

along the edge of that road, there are pretty significant plants. That's the project I learned, where when we talk about Marys Peak, we're not talking about managing this large area of land like we think of typically when we manage the Forest Service, we're talking about managing a piece of land, plant by individual plant by individual plant, because a lot of people are deeply connected to those plants and the rareness of them and concern, like Esther said, about the oxeye daisies. That's just the background to it.

So, I don't think your classic water bars might work up there. And if we have to do that, we're going to have to do a lot of talking with folks to let them know what the plan is and how we intend to move forward. Because I think the other piece of that is that we did it and people were surprised by it. They came out and found it. I think we can do a better job of coordinating with folks on that, too. That's kind of my perspective. It happened probably six, seven years ago, right when I was – I wasn't very long here when that happened, so –

ZEKE LANGUM: So, that was brought up in the field trip, and we had botanists out and the road engineer from BPA. In his original design, he was very cognizant of that. That's, again, where we were looking at the splash aprons of the energy dissipaters at the back and trying to design them to where they would have as minimal effect as possible. Nothing we do out there is going to have, you know, zero – zero, you know, consequences. You just – because, again, you know that when you're maintaining a road for a certain piece of equipment to get up it, there's going to be some, but we – when we were up there as a group, I think there were about 20 of us talking about it, looking at it, and going over the ways to make it, you know, so it has the least impact as possible. And that's kind of what we came up with is, you know, beefing up those water bars and trying to get the energy dissipaters as minimal as possible – or have as minimal a footprint as possible.

And then the other piece was to try to out-slope this road, when possible, when rocking it. You can't do it everywhere for a couple different reasons, but when possible, trying to out-slope it just so the, again, there's a little bit more sheet flow and a little bit less concentration of water.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: This is Kimberly. The only thing I'll add to that is that in the revegetation plan, we focus on water bar revegetation, recognizing that that area is problematic to be impacting the sides of the roads will be a problem, and then to have a rock area like that, revegetation can be a little bit difficult because the substrate is being changed. We did look for species that are tougher and can survive with maybe a little bit less of – a little harsher conditions like pearly everlasting and yarrow and fireweed – things that are already pretty adapted to living in – or thriving in conditions that are less than ideal for other plants for the actual rock area, and then a different suite of species for the areas that would be disturbed in the actual you know, kind of grading of that area.

The impact of those – of the water bars and a little discussion of that is in section 2.5.2. We did consider those rock areas permanently impacted because it is changing the habitat type, for sure – rocking those areas. Getting them vegetated so that you have less sedimentation seemed like an important goal. So, there will be an effort made to revegetate the outfalls of the water bars.

MARYAM HABIBI: We do have one other comment – question in the Q&A box. It seems like we may have touched on parts of this. There was mention of not finding rare species of concern in the surveys, but ecosystems on the summit are unique and need to be addressed as such. The introduction of weeds – especially oxeye daisies – has large existing seed bank, how to prevent spread.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: This is Kimberly again. Hi, Esther. The non-native invasive species such as oxeye daisy, we are considering which of those non-natives. They aren't classified as noxious weeds, they're pretty ubiquitous, but they're still a super problem, and up at Marys Peak, there's a definite

recognition that they are spreading. And as soon as an area gets disturbed, oxeye daisy, for example, moves in really fast and it's pretty aggressive and outcompetes things.

There is that recognition that we are going to, in disturbed areas, have to control those species. Luckily, most of the areas are pretty small along the – in the actual water bar areas, but along the sides of the roads, we were going to monitor that, too, because of the spreading of the gravel and at the summit.

And the species that we're focused on right now, in addition to oxeye daisy, are hairy cat's ear, and also, evidently, there's a type of velvet grass – *Holcus mollis* – that I think it's creeping velvet grass that has started to become a problem up there.

We've identified those three species for – during monitoring. There's going to be a monitoring protocol after revegetation to ensure that they don't take over the planted areas. Those are the three species, in addition to the noxious weeds that are known up there, which is St. John's wort, and also – I'm missing my other species, it's tansy ragwort, sorry. Those are the five species we're really going to focus on, but if you know of others that are really aggressive, non-native, we'd be glad to watch for those, too.

I do think the Forest Service is doing some control and there have been discussions about in the future BPA taking a more active role within the fenced area on weed control.

MICHELE HOLMAN: This is Michele Holman again. We actually had Matt Smith, he's one of our botanists here at the office, has done quite a bit of work up at the peak with non-native invasives and having weed pulls and stuff like that. They're still up there, it's still a fight, as always, but we have. We have done quite a bit of that, and Esther and Cindy, you're probably already aware of that because Matt's pretty good about engaging people who are interested.

If not, we can certainly connect you with Matt and have some conversations about kind of the future of non-native invasives, treatments up on Marys Peak and get you engaged in that. Yes, we had that quite a bit, so –

MARYAM HABIBI: So, we do have just a couple of final comments. One is: Remember that rainfall is far greater on the summit than anything – any surrounding areas, sometimes with 100-mile-per-hour winds. That amplifies the runoff volumes and velocities.

ZEKE LANGUM: Yeah, we would agree with that. That's why it's kind of important to try to get that water off the road intermittently as much as possible to try to mitigate that extra flow. I mean, that's important anywhere, but especially in this area.

MARYAM HABIBI: And then the last comment that we have, and then probably hand it over to folks to close out: Fireweed may be fairly tall compared to existing species along the roadside. Keep to lower heights to blend in.

KIMBERLY ST. HILAIRE: I agree. I think the fireweed on the road to Marys Peak would likely look a little odd to have bunches of tall fireweed along the access road. On the road to West Point Spur, though, there is – there are some large clumps of fireweed right along the road, and there's a lot taller – a lot more vertical diversity along the road to West Point Spur. So, that's a good point, that it would probably be more appropriate for West Point Spur.

At this point, the revegetation plan needs to apply to all alternatives, since one hasn't been chosen. So, we basically created a draft revegetation plan that focuses on all alternatives so that we're sure we get seed

collection and comments – if an Action Alternative is selected, that we're ready for it and that they've grown out everything we needed.

So, we basically ask them to collect the most – and any alternative that would require the most, and we believe that would be 3C would require the most plants and species that were ready for whatever, but that's great input, Cindy, and I think those are really important comments for us to consider so that you're right, it would be better if they blend in rather if the rocky aprons – I think we call them aprons in the EA – if they were made less obvious or blended rather than become really obvious, such as by putting a clump of fireweed in.

MICHELLE WHALEN: It looks like we are done with questions and no one has a hand raised, is that correct?

MARYAM HABIBI: That's correct.

MICHELLE WHALEN: Thank you. Before we have the three agencies give their closing comments, I just wanted to remind everybody that if you'd like to comment after the meeting, you can visit the project website to see the different ways that you can comment, and the comment period closes on November 23rd, 2020. Now, we'll hear from the three agencies.

(Break for direction.)

BEN YOUNCE: So, first, just want to thank everyone for attending and participating. I'm really pleased with the number of questions that came in and the comment period. To be honest, I was expecting that this would maybe peter out after a few, so this is great to see that everyone is still engaged in this process, and it's been a long one. We've been along this for quite some time. So, from the BPA side, thank you, everybody, we appreciate your participation and thanks to the U.S. Forest Service and BLM for your cooperation as well.

PAUL TIGAN: Yeah, this is Paul. Couldn't have said it better, myself. Thanks for everyone's participation tonight.

MICHELE HOLMAN: Yeah, thanks, Paul. This is Michele. And I just wanted to say that, you know, sticking with this – on these kind of projects and engaging continually, this project has lasted quite a long time. I know that several of you have engaged from the beginning. I just appreciate, you know, your interest in this project and sticking in it with us. I want you to know that your comments do count. We read all of them. And that, you know, acknowledge, once again, the value of Marys Peak and the fact it is a special place. And that is not lost on any of us. I just want everyone to understand that. So, with that, I'm done. So –

MICHELLE WHALEN: Thank you, Michele. Thanks again, everyone. I think we will say that this meeting is officially now adjourned. Have a good evening.

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