

**Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)**  
**for the**  
**Nisqually Transmission Line Relocation Project**  
DOE/EA-1485

## **Summary**

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This notice announces Bonneville Power Administration's (Bonneville) environmental findings on the Nisqually Transmission Line Relocation Project. The project involves removing and rerouting two miles of transmission line corridor that presently crosses the Nisqually Indian Reservation (Reservation) and a Fort Lewis Military Reservation (Fort Lewis) parcel in Thurston County, Washington. The corridor contains two transmission lines, the Olympia-Grand Coulee 287-kilovolt (kV) line and the Olympia-South Tacoma 230-kV line.

This relocation is being proposed because the 50-year easement for one of the lines on the Reservation has expired. The second line has a perpetual easement. The Nisqually Indian Tribe (Tribe) has requested that Bonneville remove both lines from the Reservation, and from another parcel of land the Tribe is proposing to obtain from Fort Lewis. The Tribe would like to use the highway frontage now occupied by the lines for future Tribal community development.

Bonneville, in cooperation with Fort Lewis, the Tribe, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, has prepared an Environmental Assessment (DOE/EA-1485) evaluating the proposed project and its alternatives. Based on the analysis in the EA, Bonneville has determined that, with the use of mitigation measures, the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment, within the meaning of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. Therefore, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required and Bonneville is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action is not the type of action that normally requires preparation of an EIS and is not without precedent. Fort Lewis will issue its own findings and decision for the project.

Attached is a Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) that lists all the mitigation measures Bonneville is committed to implementing, some of which help render the impacts not significant.

## **Public Availability**

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This FONSI will be mailed directly to interested parties, a notification of availability will be mailed to other potentially affected parties, and the FONSI will be posted on Bonneville's website.

## **Proposed Action**

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With the Proposed Action, the two parallel transmission lines would be removed from the Reservation (about one mile) and from a parcel currently owned by Fort Lewis that is adjacent to the Reservation (about 2/3 mile of line). The lines would be rebuilt onto Fort Lewis land just south of State Route 510. Bonneville would obtain a permit from Fort Lewis to relocate the lines onto

Fort Lewis land. The transmission lines would have a 375-foot right-of-way and be constructed using either lattice-steel towers, steel poles, or a combination of the two tower types.

The relocation of the corridor may be completed in two phases depending on available funding. Phase I would include removal of the lines from the Reservation and relocating that section onto Fort Lewis. With Phase II the lines would be removed from the Fort-owned parcel and relocated onto the adjoining Fort Lewis lands.

Fort Lewis and the Tribe are proposing a land exchange as part of the Proposed Action. The Tribe would purchase several County-owned parcels located within Fort Lewis. The Tribe would then give those parcels to Fort Lewis in exchange for a Fort-owned parcel adjacent to the Reservation.

The proposed construction would start in the spring and continue through fall 2005. Details of the Proposed Action are presented in Chapter 2 of the EA.

## **Alternatives**

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Three alternatives to the Proposed Action were identified and analyzed. With **Alternative 1 – Double-Circuit Towers on Existing Easement**, Bonneville would remove the portion (about a half mile) of the Olympia-Grand Coulee line that is currently located on the expired easement on the Reservation. To replace this portion, the adjacent section of the Olympia-South Tacoma line on the existing perpetual easement would be rebuilt using double-circuit towers to carry both lines. With **Alternative 2 – Relocate the Olympia-Grand Coulee Line Only**, Bonneville would remove the Olympia-Grand Coulee transmission line (that has the expired easement) from the Reservation, and leave the Olympia-South Tacoma line in place. The Olympia-Grand Coulee would be rebuilt on Fort Lewis as described for the Proposed Action (Phase I section only). With the **No Action Alternative**, Bonneville would not take action to relocate either transmission line. Leaving the situation as is, Bonneville would be in violation of the easement rights of the Olympia-Grand Coulee line.

## **Significance of Potential Impacts of the Proposed Action**

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To determine whether the Proposed Action or the alternatives have the potential to cause significant environmental effects, the potential impact of each alternative on human and natural resources was evaluated. This impact analysis is in Chapter 3 of the EA and is summarized for the Proposed Action below. To evaluate potential impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance activities, four impact levels were used—high, moderate, low, and no impact, defined in Appendix A of the EA for each resource area. These impact levels are based on the considerations of context and intensity defined in Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR 1508.27). High impacts could be considered significant impacts, while moderate and low impacts are not. The Proposed Action, including mitigation measures Bonneville is committing to in this document, would have no significant impacts.

The following discussion provides a summary of the Proposed Action's potential impacts and the reasons these impacts would not be significant.

### **Vegetation**

The impacts to vegetation, with mitigation measures, would be low.

- Ninety-nine acres of trees would be removed for the new transmission line corridor and an additional 134 acres could be removed over time on the Fort-owned parcel to be acquired by the Tribe. The impact of removing this native plant community would be mitigated by managing 400 acres, currently owned by Thurston County and used for timber harvesting, as spotted owl habitat to be owned and managed by Fort Lewis.
- Plant habitat would change from a forested habitat to a low-growing plant community, but no protected plant species would be affected, impacts would be off-set by the designation of habitat described above, trees and understory plants would be retained where possible, and about 15 acres would be replanted with seedlings of Douglas fir and other tree species.
- Loss of native seed due to ground disturbance would be relatively small, 7 to 15 acres. Impacts would be mitigated by reseeding disturbed areas with native plant seed.
- A class C noxious weed (Scotch broom), already established in the vicinity, would likely spread, but infestation would be limited by confining disturbance areas, reseeding disturbed areas, and requiring construction vehicles to wash for noxious weed seeds prior to entering areas that are not currently infested.

## **Wildlife**

Impacts to wildlife, with mitigation measures, would be low.

- Removal of wildlife habitat, including designated critical spotted owl habitat, would include 112 acres (3 acres have no trees) for the right-of-way and potentially 134 acres of the Fort-owned parcel that would be acquired by the Tribe. This permanent removal of habitat would be mitigated by designating 400 acres (currently used for timber harvesting) as spotted owl habitat to be owned and managed by Fort Lewis.
- Wildlife disturbance due to noise would occur during construction and periodically over the life of the line during maintenance activities; these impacts would be temporary and low. Restricting helicopter flights over certain areas would mitigate potential impacts to the bald eagle or marbled murrelet.
- Heavy equipment and logging would only temporarily disturb medium and large mammals and temporarily reduce prey populations/food resources; no protected species would be affected.
- Bird collisions with conductors or fiber optic cable would be low, because the area is not a high waterfowl-use area (waterfowl have the highest incident of mortality from transmission line collision).

In addition, as required by Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, Bonneville analyzed potential impacts to listed species in a Biological Assessment, submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Bonneville believes that the mitigation measures identified in the EA and committed to in the MAP would be sufficient to ensure that no significant impacts occur to listed species. However, Bonneville would follow any additional Terms and Conditions identified by the USFWS in its Biological Opinion for the project.

## **Soils and Geology**

Impacts to soils, with mitigation measures, would be low-to-moderate.

- Ground disturbing activities (logging, grading, road building) would expose soils to rain, but erosion would be limited to minor sheet erosion and occasional small channels with the use of Best Management Practices for controlling erosion.
- Heavy equipment would only minimally compact soils, because areas for equipment work would be limited (total 7 to 15 acres) and the ground would be tilled, where necessary, and reseeded after disturbance.
- Removal of productive topsoil would be limited to tower or pole sites and new spur roads.

## **Water Resources and Fish**

No water bodies or fish would be impacted, because there are none within the construction area. Seasonal streams and wetlands located on the County-owned parcels would not have any changes to them due to the land exchange.

## **Land Use and Transportation**

Impacts to land use and transportation would be low-to-moderate.

- Placement of transmission lines and roads would require a new right-of-way, but would not prevent the continuation of Fort Lewis training activities.
- Construction and maintenance activities would cause only brief, temporary interruption of land use activities and traffic on SR 510 from noise, dust, and construction traffic.
- The removal of the existing line would have only moderate overall impacts, because the beneficial impact of line removal is somewhat lessened by the impacts of rebuilding the line in a new location.
- The change in land ownership of the County-owned parcels to Fort Lewis would cause only minor land use changes; training activities would continue, but timber harvesting practices would change to be consistent with spotted owl habitat enhancement.
- The change in land ownership of the Fort-owned parcel (to be acquired by the Tribe) may change the land use of the parcel, but future land use is speculative.

## **Visual Quality**

Impacts to visual quality, with mitigation measures, would most likely be low.

- Construction activities (trucks, dust) would have short-term, low visual impacts on residents and motorists.
- The clearing of trees and the new lines (towers or steel poles, conductors, etc.) would have a low to moderate visual impact on a few residents; three residents would have middleground views of the lines from their backyards. However, the existing lines would be removed from

the front-yard views of those same residents. One resident would have background views of the lines and tree clearing.

- Motorists would have views of the lines along SR 510 for about a mile and intermittent views of the highway crossings. These visual impacts would be low-to-moderate, because commercial development and the forested landscape would continue to dominate the visual setting. Seedlings would be planted in the 125-foot area between SR 510 and the transmission lines; over time the trees would grow large enough to help screen the lines from view.
- Removing the lines would have a beneficial visual impact for motorists along SR 510, residents of the Reservation, and tourists of the Red Wind Casino.

## **Cultural Resources**

No impacts are expected. No cultural resources were found during site surveys and mitigation measures are in place in case of discoveries during construction.

## **Socioeconomics**

Impacts to socioeconomics would be low and mostly beneficial.

- Money coming into the area (through the purchase of goods, employing local workers, non-local workers paying for lodging and food) would increase jobs or spending in the county by less than 0.5 percent.
- Disruption of existing business due to construction activities would be limited to some noise and brief traffic disruptions over a 6-month period.

## **Noise**

Impacts to noise levels would be low-to-moderate.

- Construction activities would create typical short-term construction equipment noise impacts. These impacts would be moderate and would be limited to daylight hours.
- Long-term corona noise from the lines would be low, below the 50-dBA Bonneville criterion that meets State standards. Any existing corona-generated noise would be removed from the existing right-of-way.

## **Public Health and Safety**

Impacts to public health and safety would be low.

- Safety impacts from construction activities would be low with the use of safety measures and traffic control to prevent accidents.
- Any potential for shocks or exposure to magnetic fields would be lessened because the lines would be placed in a less populated area where fewer activities occur that could cause people to come in contact with the lines. The three households that are presently exposed to low

levels of magnetic fields from the existing lines would have similar or less exposure with the relocated lines.

## **Air Quality**

Impacts to air quality would be low.

- Minor increases in emissions would be temporary, confined to the immediate vicinity, and air quality would not be perceptibly affected.

**Determination:** Based on the information in the EA, as summarized here, Bonneville determines that the Proposed Action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA, 42 U.S.C. 4321 et seq. Therefore, an EIS would not be prepared and Bonneville is issuing this FONSI for the Proposed Action.

Issued in Portland, Oregon.

<u>/s/ G. K. Delwiche</u>	<u>2/7/05</u>
Gregory K. Delwiche	Date
Vice President	
Environment, Fish and Wildlife	