

STREAMLINING SECTION 7 CONSULTATION -- CARIBOU-TARGHEE N.F.

1. **District:** Soda Springs Ranger District [**Note:** *Additional streamlining may be necessary for the entire project.*]
2. **Date of this Streamlining Meeting:** March 28, 2007
3. **Project Name:** Lower Valley Energy Power Line
4. **Project Location** [*for the 2 mile section on National Forest System lands*] (**attach maps**): **Legal:** T17S R44E Sec 19-22, 29; Boise Meridian, Caribou County, Idaho. **Landmarks:** about 15 miles northeast of Soda Springs, ID. **Quads:** Upper Valley. **Watershed:** Blackfoot River/Snake River. **Streams:** Mill Canyon Creek and Blackfoot River. **Acres:** Maximum of 24 acres of vegetation disturbance, likely much less due to use of naturally open areas for siting line. **Miles:** 2, no road building. **Elevation:** 6,500 – 7,400 feet. **Access:** Blackfoot River Road #095 and Mill Canyon Roads #878 & #1257. **IDFG Mgt Area:** 76. **Dominant Vegetation and Cover:** Aspen, subalpine fir, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, snowberry, sagebrush, and grass. **Annual Precipitation:** 25".
Description of the Proposed Action: Construction and operation of a new transmission line that connects the existing Lower Valley transmission line in Diamond Creek to a new substation near the town of Soda Springs, ID. The structures would be wood or steel single poles with six conductors strung between them (See Figure 2 for picture of single pole). Average spacing of the poles would be approximately 500 feet and the distance of construction on the National Forest approximately 2 miles (Total distance approximately 22 miles). Operation would consist of periodic maintenance, as needed, often accessed by a snow tracked machine.
Associated activities: Construction would require access by tracked machinery in most locations to drill or blast holes for poles and associated clearing of 100 foot right-of-way of trees and tall vegetation. Permanent roads are not planned or expected. Poles would be 80-90 feet tall. Six conductors would be a minimum of approximately 30 feet off the ground. There may be an additional ground wire attached at the top of the poles for a total of 7 lines between each set of poles.
Timing: Spring and Summer 2008. **Monitoring:** Noxious weed establishment and control. **Mitigation:** Reduce impacts to forested lands by siting right-of-way in open areas and south facing slopes and avoiding the state wildlife area and unroaded areas. **Note:** NEPA work is contracted out to a company known as CH2MHill out of Boise, ID.
Estimated NEPA decision date: November 2007. **Estimated implementation date:** Spring/Summer 2008.
5. **Project Leader:** Darren Olsen.
6. **Dates of any previous streamlining meetings/consultation:** none
7. **Attendees:** 03-28-07: Sandi Arena, Mark Orme, Rose Lehman, and Jim Capurso (Level One Members)
8. **Consistency with Revised Caribou Forest LMP direction:** Yes
9. **USFWS species list number and date:** 2007-SL-0303 USFWS Letter: 03-15-07 -- Threatened, Endangered, Proposed & Candidate Species which may occur on the Montpelier RD and Soda Springs RD, Caribou-Targhee NF:
10. **Bald eagle** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*): (listed) Known nesting territories near the power line: Lower Valley T7S R42E S23. Key wintering: Blackfoot and Alexander Reservoirs; Blackfoot River, Diamond Fork, and Hwy 34.
Preliminary determination: 03-28-07: *May Affect – Not Likely to Adversely Affect*. The project area is *not* within the ¼ mile nest area or the ½ mile use area, but is within the 2.5-mile home range of *one known* bald eagle nest (Lower Valley – located off NFS lands). No change to fish, waterfowl, and carrion availability is expected. The project area is within key winter range habitat along the Blackfoot River. No disturbance to or change of winter habitat. “The power lines themselves are a danger for collision (especially at the two river crossings), but the conductors are far enough apart that electrocution is not usually a problem. Mitigation to install bird diverters in areas where collision is more likely such as river crossings *is possible*, if necessary.” (D.Rose). *This preliminary determination, rationale, and mitigation may change with new information and finalization of the line location.*
11. **Gray wolf** (*Canis lupus*): (listed) the project area is within the Yellowstone nonessential experimental population area that currently has more than six breeding pairs (at the end of 2005 there were 46 wolf packs, 20 breeding pairs, and a minimum fall wolf population of 325 animals). Packs or den sites have not been found in southeast Idaho; but sightings of wolves (usually single animals) have been documented. The project area is within dispersal distance of wolves from packs in northeast Idaho and northwest Wyoming; specifically the packs south of Yellowstone National Park are closer to southeast Idaho and the Caribou zone of the Caribou-Targhee NF.
Preliminary determination: 03-28-07: “*Not likely to jeopardize*”. Recovery objectives are currently being achieved in the Yellowstone area. There are no established packs or breeding pairs on Caribou Zone of the C-T NF.

Four packs have been documented with ranges that include portions of the Targhee zone, two of these packs have produced pups, and one den site has been located on the Forest. Future wolf occurrences in or near the project area are possible. This project would not authorize the use of livestock. Increased mortality from livestock – wolf interactions would not occur. Project would not reduce available prey. Disturbances would be localized and could be easily circumvented. This streamlining discussion meets the **conference** requirement.

12. Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*): (listed) The Montpelier and Soda Springs RDs and the W-C NF are the “Linkage Zone” between the “Lynx Habitat” on the Bridger-Teton and Targhee NFs and the Ashley NF. The project area is in or near habitat that may provide linkage habitat (suitable forage and cover, and low human activity levels and road density) for lynx providing connectivity, movement, and dispersal. The Bear River, UP railroad, US 30, cultivated farmland, and urban areas between the forested habitat on the Bear River Range and the Webster / Aspen (Soda Springs RD) / Preuss Ranges forms the largest barrier between suitable lynx habitat.

Preliminary determination: 03-28-07: *No effect.* Shrub-steppe habitats are able to achieve mid-seral conditions, and native plant communities and patterns, and potential lynx prey habitat are expected to be maintained with the 2003 Caribou NF Revised Forest Plan Grazing Standards (CNF RFP S&Gs). Noxious weed control measures are an ongoing District activity. Dispersal could continue in and around the project area. Reestablishment of vegetation is expected to continue after the disturbance treatments.

Completed by A. Keyser 03-30-07 (see 03-28-07 meeting notes)



Figure 1 – Potential route across National Forest



Figure 2 - Lower Valley Transmission Line in Diamond Valley (looking southwest) – Potential tap point