



FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Construction Easement to Rocky Mountain Power
at the
Range Sheep Production Efficiency Research Unit
Dubois ID

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

In accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and implementing procedures, an environmental assessment (EA) was prepared to analyze the potential impacts of granting a construction easement to Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) to bury an overhead 7.2 kV electrical distribution in an existing easement to reduce the risk of wildfires.

Purpose and Need

The purpose and need for the proposed action is to respond to RMP's request to: (1) obtain an easement to install a new underground transmission line within the existing 15-foot-wide easement on ARS-administered federal lands (ARS Easement Grant 57-2056-06-022) and (2) ~~to~~ obtain a temporary right of entry for a construction easement to remove 20 poles and associated hardware and conductors for an existing overhead transmission line on ARS-administered federal lands. The length of the existing transmission line and its replacement is approximately 0.9 miles. The proposed action is part of a much larger RMP initiative to bury overhead transmission lines across Idaho to reduce the risk of wildfires.

Proposed Action and Alternatives

The US Department of Agriculture (USDA), Agricultural Research Service (ARS) considered two alternatives in this EA:

- Under the Proposed Action alternative, RMP would be granted a construction easement to remove the existing overhead 7.2 kV electrical transmission line and bury a new line within its easement.
- Under the No Action alternative, the Proposed Action to replace the existing overhead 7.2 kV electrical transmission line with an underground equivalent would not be undertaken.

Public Engagement

ARS will publish a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the final EA and FONSI. The NOA will be published at the public-facing, on-line USDA ARS NEPA website once this FONSI has been executed. The final EA and FONSI will be available upon request.

Potential Impacts

The EA considered the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action including cumulative impacts. The analysis completed in the EA found that no significant impacts on environmental resources would result from the implementation of the Proposed Action. The Proposed Action will be implemented in compliance with the following best management practices and mitigation measures:

Table 11: Impacts Summary

Resource Area	Alternatives	Mitigation Measures, Design Features, Construction BMPs, and Reclamation and Weed Control Requirements for Proposed Actions
Utilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy 	Proposed Actions: There would be a major beneficial impact by improving power safety and reliability throughout Clark County.	Mitigation Measures: None. Design Features/BMPs/Reclamation and Weed Control Requirements:
	No Action Alternative: There could be adverse impacts by delaying the fire hardening of the Dubois Circuit, which is the only power source to customers in Spencer and other areas of Clark County.	
Biological Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegetation • Wildlife and Habitat • Federally Protected Species 	Proposed Actions: No significant impacts identified.	Mitigation Measures: None Design Features/BMPs/Reclamation and Weed Control Requirements: <u>Federally Protected Species:</u> Though not anticipated, if federally protected species are identified during implementation of the Proposed Actions, work will be halted and the ARS representative advised. PWA Facilities, Safety, and Real Property Team will be notified immediately. Work in the sensitive area will not resume until measures to ensure compliance with the ESA are implemented. <u>Greater Sage-Grouse:</u> No construction activities would occur during the greater sage-grouse lek season or nesting/early brood-rearing season (i.e., from March 1 to June 30 per 2021 Idaho Plan [State of Idaho 2021]).
	No Action Alternative: Impacts would be adverse compared to the Proposed Actions because above ground poles would not be removed, and there is a greater (longer) risk of wildfire hazard adversely affecting habitat.	

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Resource Area	Alternatives	Mitigation Measures, Design Features, Construction BMPs, and Reclamation and Weed Control Requirements for Proposed Actions
Cultural Resources: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic Districts, Sites, Buildings, Structures • Archaeological Resources 	Proposed Actions: No significant impacts identified.	Mitigation Measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation of an Inadvertent Discovery Plan • Ground disturbance within 20 meters (approximately 66 feet) of the boundary of the Site 10CL356 is monitored by a qualified professional during implementation of the Project. Site 10CL356 is comprised of low-density prehistoric lithic scatter and historic artifact scatter. Design Features/BMPs/Reclamation and Weed Control Requirements: <p>Though not anticipated, if any undocumented sites are discovered during the Project, all work in the vicinity should be stopped and the ARS staff (510-559-6124) should be contacted immediately.</p>
	No Action Alternative: No significant impacts identified.	

Finding of No Significant Impact

After careful review of the Final EA, I have concluded that implementation of the Proposed Action will not generate significant controversy or have a significant impact on the quality of the human or natural environment. Therefore, as evidenced by my signature below, I determine that the Proposed Action will have no significant impact and the action will be implemented. This analysis fulfills the requirements of NEPA and the CEQ regulations. An Environmental Impact Statement will not be prepared, and the USDA ARS is issuing this FONSI.

Signed:

 Tara McHugh
 Area Director
 Agricultural Research Service
 U.S. Department of Agriculture

 Date