



# Big Sandy Energy Project



August 2000

This is the second newsletter prepared and distributed for the Big Sandy Energy Project. Since the first issue was distributed in April 2000, public and agency “scoping” of issues to be addressed in the Environmental Impact Statement, was completed; several agencies have joined Western Area Power Administration and the Bureau of Land Management as cooperating agencies to assist in preparing of the EIS; URS Corporation was selected by Western and BLM to prepare the required EIS; and BLM selected a project manager to manage the EIS preparation. Additional information about these activities is detailed in this newsletter. Copies of the previous issue, as well as other information about the Big Sandy Energy Project, are posted for viewing on Western’s “Big Sandy Energy Project” web site ([www.wapa.gov/big sandy/ big s.htm](http://www.wapa.gov/big sandy/ big s.htm)) or may be obtained by contacting the Western or BLM project managers listed at the end of this newsletter.

## ■ *Project background*

Caithness Big Sandy LLC proposes to construct the Big Sandy Energy Project, a 720-megawatt natural gas-fired generating facility, on private lands near Wikieup, Ariz. Caithness, a private energy development and operating company, has applied to the Western for an interconnection with the existing Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kilovolt Transmission Line and applied for permits to build portions of a natural gas supply pipeline along U.S. Highway 93 to Interstate 40 and a permanent access road and water pipeline system across public lands managed by the BLM [see map pages 4 and 5].

Based on Caithness’ applications, Western and BLM have determined that they must prepare an EIS to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, and together will be co-lead agencies. The EIS will study potential impacts to the human and natural environment from building and operating all aspects of the Big Sandy Energy Project, including the gas-fired generation facility, the electrical switchyard, the natural gas supply pipeline, the ground water supply well field and pipelines, an access road, possible agricultural activities associated with reuse of the ground water used by the generation facility, and other associated facilities.

## ■ *Project description*

The project would be a merchant plant—meaning it would not be owned by a utility or by a utility affiliate selling power to its utility, nor is it supported by a long-term power purchase agreement with a utility. Caithness would instead sell power on a short- and mid-term basis to customers and the spot market. Power purchases by customers would be voluntary and all economic costs would be borne by Caithness.

The project would consist of two phases. The first phase would feature a 500-MW natural gas-fired, combined cycle powerplant and on-site supporting infrastructure, including an administration building, warehouse storage, water treatment and storage facilities, cooling towers, water storage/evaporation ponds, gas conditioning equipment, and a new access road; a 500-kV switchyard with electrical equipment to accommodate an interconnection with the Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV Transmission Line; a

16-inch high-pressure natural gas pipeline between the generating facility and at least one natural gas supply line; and ground water supply wells and pipeline system.

The second phase would consist of an additional 220-MW combined-cycle powerplant adjacent to the first phase powerplant. Agricultural activities (such as row or field crops or aquaculture/hydroponic facilities) which would use the waste water discharged by the generation facility's cooling towers are being considered by the Mohave County Economic Development Authority, Inc., on private land in Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 12 West.

The generating facility and infrastructure would be built on private property owned by Caithness in Section 5, Township 15 North, Range 12 West, about 4 miles southeast of Wikieup, and about 2 miles east of U.S. Highway 93 crossing the Big Sandy River. The ground water supply wells, which would provide approximately 3,200 acre-feet of potable and cooling water annually to the generating facility from a deep (1,100 feet) aquifer, would be completed nearby on private property located in Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 12 West. A buried natural gas pipeline would bring high-pressure natural gas to the generating facility to fuel the gas-fired turbines from at least one natural gas transmission pipeline located about 36 miles north of the powerplant site near Interstate 40. It would be constructed parallel, within and/or adjacent to U.S. Highway 93 and Mohave County roads and utility easements. A pipeline routing parallel to the Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV Transmission Line also is being considered. The pipeline would cross private and public lands administered by the BLM and the Arizona State Land Department.

The licensing and permitting for the project is expected by Caithness to be completed in April 2001 when construction of the first phase would begin. Commercial operation is scheduled to begin in November 2002. The second phase is planned to be completed in March 2004.

## ***Scoping results***

The principal purpose of scoping is to identify public and agency issues and alternatives to be considered in the EIS. BLM and Western hosted a public scoping meeting on May 3, 2000, in Wikieup. Thirty-eight people attended, representing agencies, the Wikieup community and interested parties. Copies of flipchart notes taken at the scoping meeting, as well as a table which presents the comments/questions received at the meeting and how they will be addressed in the environmental process, are posted on Western's "Big Sandy Energy Project" web site ([www.wapa.gov/big\\_sandy/big\\_s.htm](http://www.wapa.gov/big_sandy/big_s.htm)).

In addition to the public scoping meeting, BLM and Western representatives met with the Arizona Department of Water Resources, the chair of the Arizona Power Plant and Transmission Line Siting Committee under the Arizona Corporation Commission, the Arizona State Land Department, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Discussions with other agencies with jurisdiction or interest in the project also occurred.

BLM and Western received more than 45 comment response sheets and/or letters and numerous requests to be on the project mailing list. BLM and Western have used the scoping results to define the issues that will be addressed in the EIS. The major issues that will be addressed in the EIS include:

- ◆ Short-term and long-term direct and indirect effects of ground water production from the deep aquifer and use for power plant cooling, including effects on future water supplies in the Wikieup area and stream flows in the Big Sandy River.
- ◆ Direct and indirect effects to wildlife and fishery resources and habitats, including the endangered Southwest willow flycatcher and wetland and riparian habitats.
- ◆ Direct and indirect effects to the community and values of Wikieup from construction activity, air pollutant emissions, future land use changes, landscape changes, noise and taxation changes.
- ◆ Direct and indirect effects to water quality and use in the project area, including any effects from the proposed natural gas pipeline construction.
- ◆ Effects to cultural resources and traditional cultural values and uses of the area by Native Americans.
- ◆ Effects to existing land uses from the natural gas pipeline construction.

Suggestions for alternative generating facility locations and cooling methods also were received during the scoping period. BLM and Western, with assistance from URS technical experts, are currently evaluating the feasibility of these alternatives to determine if they should be subjected to full analysis in the EIS. The results of this evaluation, as well as environmental studies conducted to date, will be presented at an environmental studies workshop scheduled to be conducted in Wikieup Aug. 29.

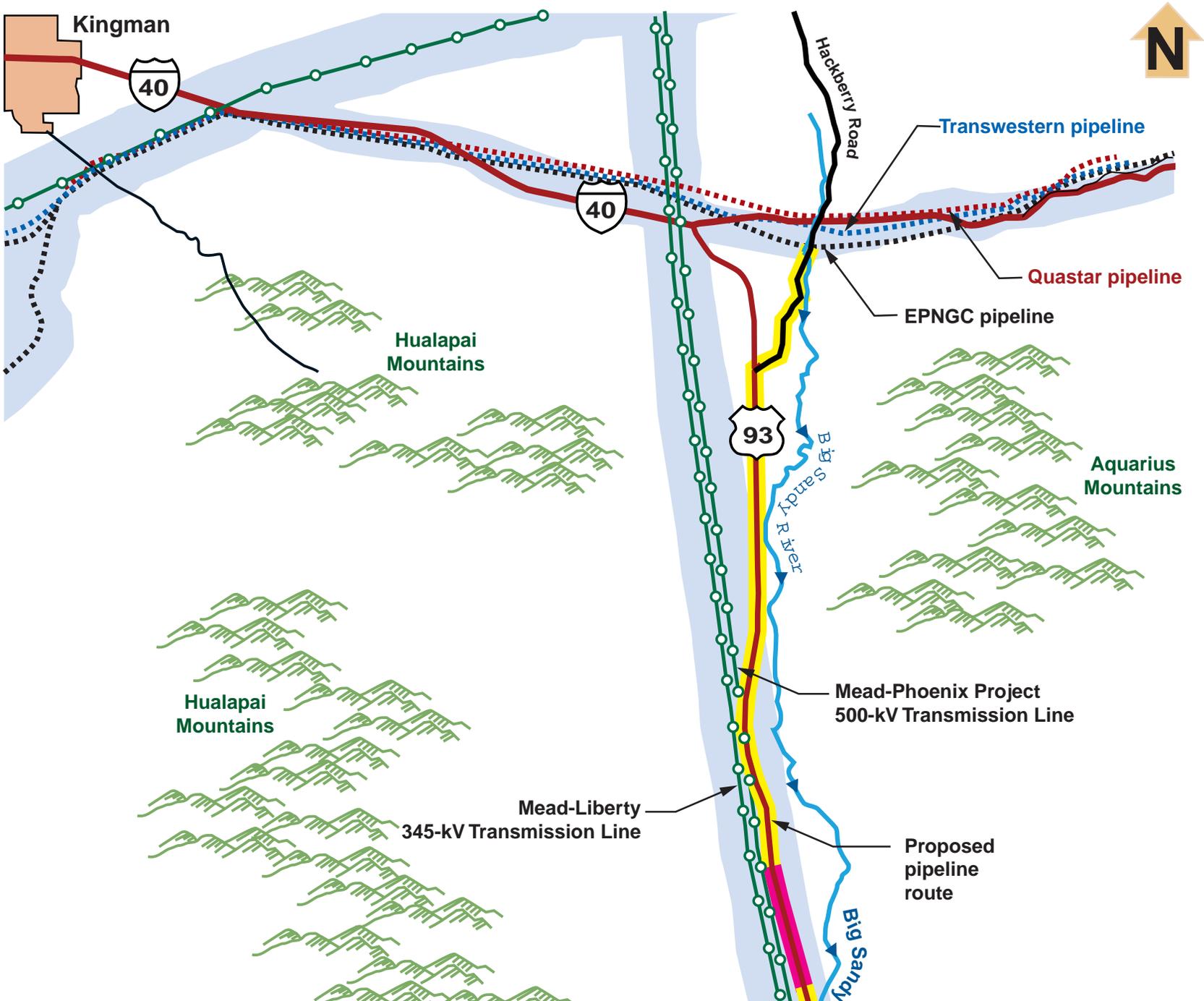
## ■ ***Cooperating Agencies***

BLM and Western are co-lead agencies jointly responsible for preparing the EIS. Cooperating agencies are those which may have jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved in a proposed project and which agree to provide this information, guidance and expertise and assist in for preparing the EIS. Currently, the following have agreed to be cooperating agencies preparing the EIS:

- ◆ Arizona Department of Transportation
- ◆ Mohave County (through the Planning and Zoning Department)
- ◆ Arizona Game and Fish Department
- ◆ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- ◆ Arizona Department of Water Resources
- ◆ Hualapai Tribe

In addition, the following also are considering joining as cooperating agencies in preparing the EIS:

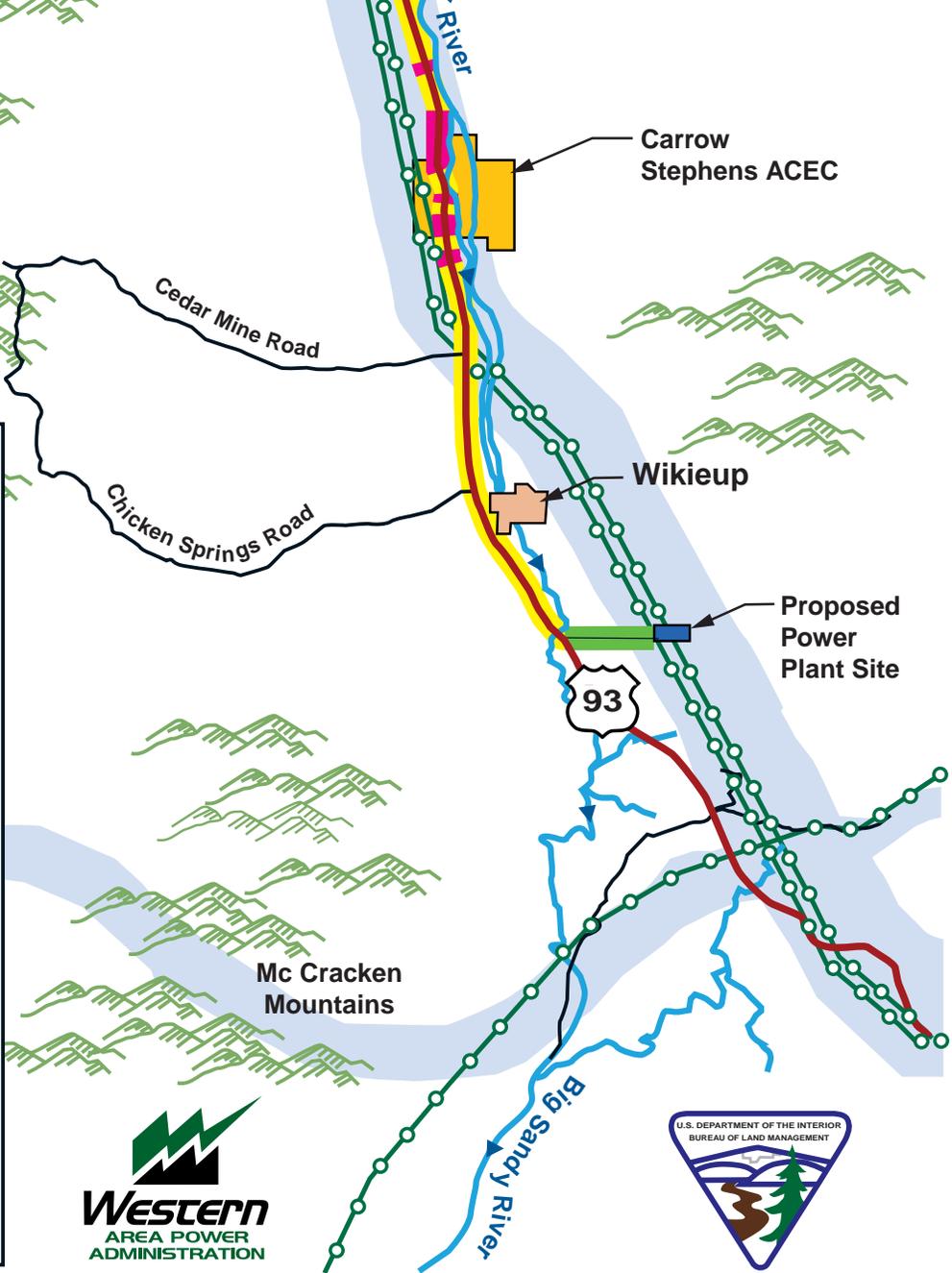
- ◆ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- ◆ Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.



# Big Sandy Energy Project

**LEGEND**

- ..... EPNGC - two parallel pipelines (gas)
- ..... Quastar - one pipeline (gas)
- ..... Transwestern - two parallel pipelines (gas)
- Light duty road
- County road
- Electric transmission line
- US/State highways
- Rivers
- Proposed access road
- Proposed gas pipeline right-of-way on state and private land
- Proposed pipeline right-of-way on BLM land
- City/township
- Carrow Stephens Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC)
- Proposed power plant site
- BLM designated utility corridors



## ■ ***EIS Preparation***

On May 14, 2000, BLM and Western issued a request for proposals from qualified environmental companies to prepare the Big Sandy Energy Project EIS. Based on evaluation of proposals received, BLM and Western selected URS to prepare the EIS. URS is an international environmental consulting firm with more than 13,000 employees in the United States. The company has substantial experience in evaluating the hydrologic effects of ground water development projects such as the Big Sandy Energy Project. The URS EIS preparation team will work out of URS offices in Phoenix, Tucson and Denver. The contract was awarded on June 7, 2000, and URS has been hard at work reviewing the available project and environmental information and developing the EIS Preparation Plan, which will describe the activities necessary to collect the additional information needed to analyze the potential effects of the project and complete the EIS.

Two technical meetings were recently held specifically to review the available hydrology and biology data and determine additional data collection needs. Representatives from BLM, Western, ADWR, FWS, URS, and AGFD, met with Caithness hydrologists to:

- ◆ review the scoping comments received related to hydrology.
- ◆ discuss the available information concerning the hydrology of the Wikieup–Big Sandy River valley (including the data collected by Caithness) which would help determine if the water from a deep (greater than 1,100 feet) aquifer that Caithness plans to use for the Big Sandy Energy Project is isolated from the upper aquifer tapped by other water users and connected to the Big Sandy River (and would thus not adversely affect these other waters).
- ◆ discuss Caithness' ongoing water well drilling, testing, sampling and monitoring program to determine if it is adequate and sufficient to answer the questions asked during scoping.

Based on BLM, FWS, ADWR and URS hydrologists' input received at the meeting, BLM and Western requested several changes and/or additions to Caithness' proposed well testing, sampling and monitoring program to increase the breadth of and confidence in the data to make the determination of possible affects and answer the scoping comments. BLM and Western also requested that URS collect some additional water samples, and undertake an update of the 1973 water balance for the basin. Caithness will continue to update the BLM, Western and cooperating agencies on the status of and schedule for the well testing program, currently scheduled to commence in mid to late August. Caithness will also provide all of the raw test data from the initial well test to the BLM, Western and cooperating agencies. These organizations will review the data and provide specific recommendations for the testing, sampling and monitoring to be conducted during the subsequent longer-term test. BLM, Western, FWS, URS, AGFD and Caithness biologists also met to review the scoping comments received related to biology and discuss the biology data collected by Caithness for the Big Sandy Energy Project to determine if it is adequate and sufficient to answer the questions asked during scoping.

BLM and Western determined that the biology information collected, if supplemented with pre-construction surveys, would likely be sufficient to answer the scoping questions, if the determination is made and validated that the Big Sandy Energy Project would not adversely affect either the waters or flow of the Big Sandy River. The biologists will review the conclusions of the hydrologists following the conclusion of the well flow tests to determine if such a finding is adequately supported.

## ■ ***Ongoing Public Participation***

Formal public scoping for the EIS closed on June 2, 2000. However, coordination and involvement with the public and appropriate Federal, state, local and tribal government agencies will continue, and comments on the proposed project and EIS will be accepted throughout the NEPA process.

As part of this ongoing process, Western and BLM have scheduled a public workshop (see next paragraph), and will provide for public review of, and conduct hearings on, the draft EIS once it is published. In addition, public review of the final EIS during a 30-day waiting period will be encouraged, as will public review of the independent BLM and Western Records of Decision.

A public information workshop will be held Aug. 29, at 7 p.m. at the Owens Whitney School, 14109 Chicken Springs Road, Wikieup, to present the project alternatives that will be addressed in the EIS as well as the results of environmental baseline studies conducted to date. The results of the workshop will be used to help BLM and Western define impact levels for the impact analysis.

## ■ ***Project Contacts***

Following a competitive bidding process, on June 7, 2000, BLM selected Dr. Dwight Carey of Environmental Management Associates, Inc., of Brea, Calif. to be the BLM Project Manager preparing the EIS for the Big Sandy Energy Project.

Project-related comments or questions should be directed to:

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Questions may be directed to Mr. Holt or Dr. Carey or submitted with the enclosed response sheet. You may also visit Western's "Big Sandy Energy Project" web site ([www.wapa.gov/bigandy/big.htm](http://www.wapa.gov/bigandy/big.htm)) to obtain current information about the Big Sandy Energy Project.

**■ EIS schedule**

*Milestone dates for the Big Sandy Energy Project EIS have been updated as follows:*

<i>Public Information Workshop</i> .....	<i>August 2000</i>
<i>Draft EIS Public review</i> .....	<i>January - February 2001</i>
<i>Draft EIS Public hearing</i> .....	<i>February 2001</i>
<i>Distribute Final EIS</i> .....	<i>May 2001</i>
<i>Records of Decision</i> .....	<i>June 2001</i>

**Please plan to attend a public information workshop  
in Wikieup Aug. 29, 2000**

**Visit [www.wapa.gov/bigandy/bigandy.htm](http://www.wapa.gov/bigandy/bigandy.htm) to get ongoing  
information about the Big Sandy Project.**

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