



Big Sandy Energy Project



■ **Federal Big Sandy Energy Project EIS process continues**

Although the Arizona Corporation Commission denied the request for a state Certificate of Environmental Compatibility for the Caithness Big Sandy, L.L.C. Big Sandy Energy Project, the Federal review process for the project is separate from the state siting process. Because Caithness has not withdrawn its Federal rights-of-way applications or the application for a Federal interconnection agreement, both Western Area Power Administration and the Bureau of Land Management are continuing with the Environmental Impact Statement process for the project.

■ **Project background**

Caithness proposes to build the Big Sandy Energy Project, a 720-megawatt natural gas-fired combined cycle generating facility, on private lands near Wikieup, Arizona. A private energy development and operating company, Caithness has applied to Western for an interconnection with the existing Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV Transmission Line. Caithness has also applied to BLM for approval to build portions of a natural gas supply line along this transmission line, and a permanent access road and water pipeline system, across public lands managed by BLM.

■ **State siting process**

On Nov. 26, 2001, the Arizona Corporation Commission voted to uphold the Arizona Power Plant and Line Siting Committee's decision to deny a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility for the Big Sandy Energy Project. Before voting, the ACC discussed the project and

heard public comments at a special open meeting. The Commissioners cited unresolved issues and stated that Caithness' proposal did not meet the burden of proof for the issuance of a certificate. Although the ACC's decision does not directly affect the Federal EIS process, Caithness must still be granted a certificate by the ACC to build and operate the project, and is expected to reapply for approval of the certificate once the Final EIS is complete.

■ **The Draft EIS - what we heard from you**

Western and BLM held a public hearing in July 2001 to gather comments on the Draft EIS, which was issued in June 2001. To encourage public comment, the agencies mailed more than 430 copies of the EIS and more than 20 copies of the EIS summary to interested parties. We also sent everyone on our mailing list a newsletter announcing the start of the comment period and the release of the Draft EIS. These publications were also available for review at Western's Phoenix Office, BLM's Kingman Office, the Owens Elementary School in Wikieup and the DOE Reading Room in Washington, D.C.

BLM and Western received 38 comment letters, and 18 individuals presented verbal comments during the public hearing, about the Draft EIS during the 45-day comment period. Comments came from agencies, organizations and private parties.

BLM and Western thank all those who attended the public hearings or provided written comments. We appreciate your input. The Final EIS will include responses to all substantive comments, and all comments will be considered in BLM's and Western's decision-making process.

■ ***Changes to the proposed action and new information***

Since we issued the Draft EIS in June, Caithness has proposed a number of changes to the project. These were not addressed in the Draft EIS. BLM and Western have also received some new information about the project area. Since the Draft EIS was issued, Caithness has:

- Revised the power plant design to reduce air emissions.
- Increased the height of the second-phase combustion gas exhaust stacks and the communication tower.
- Reduced the size of the evaporation ponds and added separate sediment ponds for stormwater management.
- Added an emergency access road and increased the area enclosed by the plant site fence.
- Reduced the total area of disturbance.
- Added an optional access road alignment to the proposed powerplant from U.S. Highway 93 that avoids crossing Sycamore Creek.
- Revised the proposed route for the natural gas pipeline to generally follow the transmission line corridor and expanded the width of some corridor segments of the proposed route.
- Eliminated the agricultural development that had been proposed for approximately 106 acres of land within Section 7.
- Proposed granting a conservation easement of Banegas Ranch lands in the Big Sandy River floodplain to the Arizona Department of Game and Fish.
- Proposed the transfer of all Banegas Ranch water right claims to Arizona Department of Game and Fish.
- Committed to ceasing irrigation of the Banegas Ranch and leaving the irrigation water in the Big Sandy River.
- Revised the proposed groundwater monitoring plan and Big Sandy River flow augmentation and monitoring via a Deed of Easement For Riparian Maintenance of the Benegas Ranch Area of the Big Sandy River.
- Acknowledged that there is no agreement-in-concept with the owner of Cofer Hot Spring to compensate for or replace any water lost from reduction in flow of the spring.

Since the Draft EIS was issued, new information about the environment of the project area has been received regarding:

- The specific traditional cultural property of Cofer Hot Spring identified by the Hualapai Tribe.
- The identified presence of the endangered Yuma clapper rail within the project region of influence.

BLM and Western reviewed and analyzed the potential effects of these proposed changes and new information about the environment in a Supplement Analysis to determine whether or not to prepare a Supplemental Draft EIS. The Supplement Analysis describes new, potentially significant impacts to surface water rights at Cholla Canyon Ranch and grazing in the Hot Spring Allotment which result from the lack of an agreement to compensate for or replace any water lost from reduction in flow of Cofer Hot Spring. It also identifies more specific information regarding the significant impacts to the traditional cultural property of Cofer Hot Spring which has been determined to be eligible to the National

Register of Historic Places. When published, copies of the Supplement Analysis will be available through the contacts on the back of this newsletter and Western's Big Sandy Energy Project Web site. Copies of the SA will also be located at:

Western Area Power Administration

615 S. 43rd Ave.
Phoenix, Ariz.

Bureau of Land Management

2475 Beverly Ave.
Kingman, Ariz.

Owens Elementary School

14109 E. Chicken Springs Rd.
Wikieup, Ariz.

DOE Reading Room

Forrestal Building
Washington, D.C.

■ **Supplemental
Draft EIS**

As a result of the findings of the Supplement Analysis, BLM and Western decided to prepare a Supplemental Draft EIS to address the new impacts to water rights at Cholla Canyon Ranch, grazing in the Hot Springs Allotment and the specifically identified traditional cultural property at Cofer Hot Spring. Also, BLM and Western are exploring opportunities to reduce water consumption by the project, and the Supplemental Draft EIS will present an analysis of any viable alternatives. We anticipate completing the Supplemental Draft EIS in April 2002 and its availability will be announced in the *Federal Register* and a future newsletter. We also will distribute the Supplemental Draft EIS to all those who received a copy of the Draft EIS.

We invite you to review and comment on the Supplemental Draft EIS, either in writing or at the public hearing Western will hold during a 45-day public comment period.

BLM and Western will schedule a public workshop to present the findings of the Supplemental Draft EIS, and provide interested parties an opportunity to ask questions about the Supplemental Draft EIS before the public hearing on the Supplemental Draft EIS. BLM and Western will respond to all substantive comments received on the original Draft EIS and the Supplemental Draft EIS in a Final EIS, which we expect to issue in July 2002.

■ **Endangered species
consultation**

BLM and Western are working to complete a Biological Assessment, which will likely be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in March 2002 to begin the formal consultation process required by the Endangered Species Act. The Biological Assessment will address the project's impacts to threatened and endangered species and proposed measures to reduce these impacts and enhance the status of the identified species. The formal consultation process will conclude with a USFWS-issued Biological Opinion that will include a determination regarding whether or not the project would jeopardize the continued existence of listed species or critical habitat and reasonable and prudent ways to protect and enhance endangered species habitat. We expect the consultation process would be completed by June 2002. The Final EIS will include the results of the Biological Assessment, Biological Opinion and the endangered species consultation.

■ **Future steps...**

The Final EIS will be prepared after the public comment period for the Supplement Draft EIS ends and the Biological Opinion is received from the USFWS. After a minimum 30-day public review period for the Final EIS, BLM and Western will each issue Records of Decision. If Western's decision is to approve the requested Interconnection Agreement, it will also issue a Mitigation Action Plan with its ROD or prior to construction. If BLM's decision is to approve the requested rights-of-way, the rights-of-way grant will contain conditions of approval consistent with the mitigation measures identified as necessary in the Final EIS. BLM's ROD will contain an explanation of the monitoring of the implementation of the required mitigation.

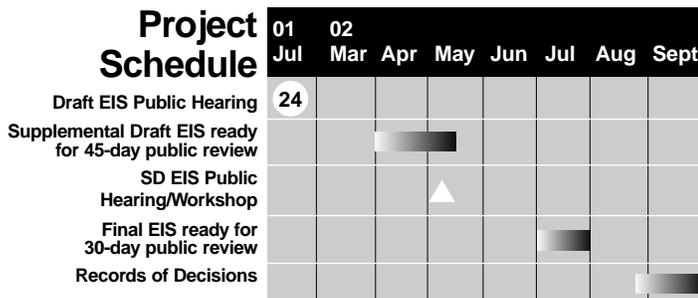
■ **Contact us**

Please direct project-related comments or questions to:

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Dwight Carey, EIS Project Manager
 Bureau of Land Management
 2475 Beverly Ave.
 Kingman, Ariz. 86401
 Phone: (928) 692-4400
 Fax: (928) 692-4414
 E-mail: dlcarey@emacorp.com

More information about the project is available from Holt or Carey or on the project Web site at www.wapa.gov/interconn/int sandy.htm.



Issue Notice of Intent in Federal Register April 18, 2000

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| Scoping Meeting | Wikieup, AZ | May 3, 2000 |
| Scoping Comment Period Expired | | June 2, 2000 |
| EIS Contractor Hired | | June 7, 2000 |
| Public Workshop | Wikieup, AZ | August 29, 2000 |
| Pubic Workshop | Peach Springs, AZ | August 30, 2000 |
| Notice of Availability for Draft EIS Issuance | | June 22, 2001 |
| Public Workshop on Draft EIS | Wikieup, A | July 10, 2001 |
| Public Hearing on Draft EIS | Wikieup, AZ | July 24, 2001 |
| Completion of 45 Day Review Period | | August 6, 2001 |
| Notice of Availability for Supplemental Draft EIS | | April 2002 |
| Public Workshop/Hearing in Wikieup | | May 2002 |
| Expiration of 45-Day Public Review on Supplementa | | June 2002 |
| Notice of Availability for Final EIS Issuance | | July 2002 |
| Completion of 30 Day Waiting Period | | August 2002 |
| Record of Decisions Issued | | September 2002 |
| Mitigation Action Plan Issued | | September 2002 |