



Big Sandy Energy Project



■ **Project status**

This is the fourth newsletter prepared and distributed for the Big Sandy Energy Project by the Bureau of Land Management and Western Area Power Administration. Since the last newsletter in November 2000, Caithness Big Sandy, LLC has revised the proposed route for the natural gas pipeline, and BLM and Western have added a second alternative pipeline route to be analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement. In addition, the EIS timeline has been updated with the release of the Draft EIS now scheduled for late May 2001.

Copies of previous newsletters, as well as other information about the Big Sandy Energy Project, are available for viewing on Western's Big Sandy Energy Project web site (www.wapa.gov/interconn/intersandy.htm) or by contacting the Western or BLM project managers listed on page 6.

■ **Project background**

Caithness 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 Western for an interconnection with the existing Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV 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 Bureau of Land Management

■ **Why an EIS?**

Based on Caithness' applications, Western and BLM have determined that they must prepare an environmental impact statement to comply with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, and together are co-lead agencies for the preparation of this EIS.

The 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, and the Hualapai Tribe have agreed to be cooperating agencies in preparing this EIS. URS Corp. was selected by Western and BLM to prepare the EIS, which reports on the 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 on land near the proposed power plant site and other associated facilities.

See page 2 for additional information about the Big Sandy Energy Project.

■ ***Big Sandy to be a merchant plant***

The Big Sandy Energy 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 on the spot market. Power purchases by customers would be voluntary and all economic costs would be borne by Caithness.

Two phases

The project would consist of two phases. The first phase would feature a 500-MW natural gas-fired, combined cycle power plant 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 existing natural gas supply line; and ground water supply wells and pipeline system.

The second phase would consist of an additional 220-MW combined-cycle power plant adjacent to the first phase of the power plant.

Infrastructure

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 production wells, which would provide approximately 3,200 acre-feet (to a maximum of 4,850 acre-feet) of potable and cooling water annually to the generating facility from a deep (greater than 1,100 feet) aquifer, would be completed nearby on private property located in Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 12 West.

Natural gas pipeline

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 39 miles north of the power plant site near Interstate 40. Caithness proposes to construct the pipeline in a corridor located immediately east and outside of portions of the U.S. Highway 93 right-of-way, the Mead-Phoenix Project 500-kV transmission line, and within Mohave County roads and utility easements. Thirteen different corridor segments will be addressed in the EIS as further described in this newsletter. The pipeline would cross private and public lands administered by the BLM and the Arizona State Land Department.

Agricultural activities (such as orchard, row or field crops) using up to 400 gallons per minute (up to 650 acre feet per year) of ground water supplied by the project are proposed as part of the project by the Mohave County Economic Development Authority, Inc., on private land in Section 7, Township 15 North, Range 12 West.

■ ***Project timeline***

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

■ ***Proposed project changes delay EIS release***

As a result of concerns expressed by the Arizona Department of Transportation, Caithness -Big Sandy, LLC has recently revised the proposed route for the natural gas pipeline, and the Bureau of Land Management and the Western Area Power Administration have added a second alternative pipeline route to be analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement. This has resulted in a delay of the anticipated distribution date of the Draft EIS to late May 2001.

ADOT recently expressed concerns with the original alignment of the natural gas pipeline proposed by Caithness within the eastern edge of the existing U.S. Highway 93 right-of-way due to the potential for conflicts with the proposed improvements of U.S. Highway 93 in this area. Following discussions between ADOT, Caithness and BLM, the proposed pipeline route was relocated to a corri-

dor immediately to the east and outside of the existing U.S. Highway 93 right-of-way, subject to field-verification by Caithness.

Following Caithness' additional field investigations, and subsequent discussions between BLM, Western, Caithness and ADOT, thirteen different corridor segments, ranging in width from 100 feet (within road rights-of-way) to nearly one mile (to provide additional room to avoid sensitive resources and topographic obstacles), were selected for consideration in the EIS for routing the natural gas supply pipeline from the existing natural gas pipelines in the Interstate 40 corridor to the proposed power plant site. These thirteen corridor segments consist of five corridor segments within or following existing or proposed roads (R1 – R5); five corridor segments generally following the existing Mead-Phoenix and adjacent Mead-Liberty transmission lines (T1 – T5), and three corridor segments that provide for potential crossovers between the road and transmission line corridor segments (C1 – C3). These pipeline corridor segments are shown on the enclosed map.

The natural gas pipeline now proposed by Caithness (the Proposed Action) would be built within (from north to south) corridor segments R1, C1, T3, C3, T4 and R5. Two alternative routes for the natural gas pipeline will also be analyzed in the EIS. The Road Alternative consists of corridor segments R1, R2, R3, C3, R4 and R5. The Transmission Line Alternative consists of

corridor segments T1, T2, T3, C3, T4, and T5.

The EIS will identify known sensitive resources within each corridor segment, which may be affected by the construction or operation of the pipeline and should be avoided. It will report on analyses of the effects of building and operating the natural gas pipeline, including required construction staging areas and an approximately 75-foot-wide area of disturbance along the route, within each of these proposed pipeline corridors.

However, the final pipeline alignment within the corridor segments and route approved by the agencies will not be selected nor approved until after the EIS and detailed, pre-construction surveys are completed and any site-specific issues resolved.

■ **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 are encouraged throughout the NEPA process.

As part of this ongoing process, BLM and Western will provide for public review of, and conduct a public hearing on, the draft EIS once it is published. In addition, a workshop is planned after the release of the draft EIS and prior to the public hearing to provide interested

stakeholders an opportunity to ask questions on the EIS analyses. After the final EIS is issued, a public review of the document during a 30-day waiting period is encouraged, as well as public review of the independent BLM and Western Records of Decision.

■ **Project Contacts**

Project-related comments or questions should be directed to:

Mr. John Holt
Environmental Manager,
Desert Southwest Customer Service
Region
Western Area Power Administration
P.O. Box 6457
Phoenix, AZ, 85005-6457
(602) 352-2592
Fax: (602) 352-2630
e-mail: holt@wapa.gov

Dr. Dwight Carey
BLM Project Manager
Kingman Field Office
Bureau of Land Management
2475 Beverly Avenue
Kingman, AZ 86401
(520) 692-4437
Fax: (520) 692-4414
e-mail: dlcarey@emacorp.com
Direct Phone No.: (714) 529-3695
Cell Phone No.: (714) 267-9906
Direct Fax No.: (714) 529-8543

Questions may be directed to Mr. Holt or Dr. Carey. You may also visit Western's Big Sandy Energy Project Web site (www.wapa.gov/interconn/intsandy.htm) to obtain current information about the project.

EIS Schedule

Milestones for the Big Sandy Energy Project EIS have been updated:

Draft EIS public review June-July 2001

Public workshop on draft EIS June 2001

Draft EIS public hearing June 2001

Distribute final EIS August 2001

**Visit www.wapa.gov/interconn/intsandy.htm
to get ongoing
information about the Big Sandy Project.**