

7 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

This section describes the irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources associated with implementing the Proposed Project. An “irreversible commitment of resources” occurs when, once committed to the Proposed Project, the resource would continue to be committed throughout the life of the Proposed Project. An “irretrievable commitment of resources” refers to those resources that, once used, consumed, destroyed or degraded during construction, operation, or decommissioning of the Proposed Project, would cause the resource to be unavailable for use by future generations. Examples of irretrievable types of resources include nonrenewable resources, such as minerals and cultural resources, as well as renewable resources that would be unavailable for the use of future generations such as loss of production, harvest, or habitat.

If wind turbines are not upgraded, upon termination of operations, the Applicants have a contractual obligation to the landowners to remove the wind facilities, including foundations to a depth of four feet. The Applicants also have an obligation to restore the area to a condition reasonably similar to the condition of the surrounding soil. The Applicants may explore alternative methods to accomplish decommissioning of the Proposed Project at the time that this activity approaches. Decommissioning activities would be conducted in compliance with applicable rules and regulations.

Constructing and operating the Proposed Project Components would constitute an irreversible commitment of land, soil and vegetation for the life of the Proposed Project. The area of the underground collector and communication systems would be revegetated. While the Winner Alternative would require a slightly larger use of land, soil and vegetation, the commitments of these resources would be similar for either of the proposed alternatives.

Constructing the wind turbines and transmission structures would remove a minimal amount of agricultural lands from production and is an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of farmland. The Proposed Project would result in few changes to existing agricultural practices because farming and grazing would continue in and around the wind turbines and other Proposed Project Components.

Some biological resources would be lost due to the construction and operation of the Proposed Project. Construction of the Proposed Project Components would result in the permanent loss of a small amount of native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Operation of the wind farm would likely result in avian and bat mortalities. A BA is being prepared under Section 7 of the ESA for Federally-listed species. Findings of the BA will be summarized in the FEIS.

Cultural resources are nonrenewable resources. Irretrievable commitments of cultural resources, such as prehistoric properties, historic properties and cultural landscapes, cannot be determined until the results of the Class III Survey and TCP Survey are completed. A MOA is being developed among Western, RUS, SHPO, affected Federal agencies, Applicants, and interested Native American Tribes in conjunction with preparation of the EIS. The preferred mitigation

measure is to avoid identified sites; however, the MOA would provide an agreement among the parties for the treatment of the unavoidable adverse impacts. Compliance with the MOA provisions would ensure that Section 106 requirements are met.