



# United States Department of the Interior

## FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Ecological Services  
Nebraska Field Office  
9325 South Alda Road  
Wood River, Nebraska 68883

November 5, 2014

**FWS-NE: 2015-18**

Mr. Matt Marsh  
Environmental Manager  
Western Area Power Administration  
Upper Great Plains Customer Service Region  
PO Box 35800  
Billings, MT 59107-5800

Dear Mr. Marsh:

This letter acknowledges the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) receipt of your October 1, 2014, letter requesting initiation of formal section 7 consultation and conference under the Endangered Species Act and attached Final Biological Assessment (BA) for the proposed Grand Prairie Wind Project (Project). The consultation concerns the possible effects of the construction, maintenance, operation, and decommissioning of the proposed Project on the federally endangered black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*), Interior least tern (*Sternula antillarum*), whooping crane (*Grus americana*), and American burying beetle (*Nicrophorus americanus*); and threatened piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*), western prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*), and gray wolf (*Canis lupus*). The conference concerns the possible Project effects on federally proposed endangered northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*) and federally proposed threatened rufa red knot (*Calidris canutus rufa*).

The regulations which implement section 7 of the Act (50 Code of Federal Regulations §402.14) define the information that the lead Federal agency is required to supply to the Service to initiate formal consultation. We have examined the BA and believe it contains adequate information to initiate formal consultation on the possible effects from the Project.

As specified in 50 CFR §402, the Service is required to complete formal consultation and provide its biological opinion within 135 days of receipt of your request (unless we mutually agree to an extension). Therefore, we expect to provide you with our biological opinion no later than February 13, 2015.

As a reminder, the Act requires that after initiation of consultation, the Federal action agency may not make any irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources that limits future options. This provision is to insure that if during the consultation it is found that the proposed action is likely to jeopardize the continued existence of endangered or threatened species or cause adverse modification of their designated critical habitats, the agency's actions will not have precluded the formulation or implementation of reasonable and prudent alternatives.

We look forward to working with Western Area Power Administration and the Project developer to complete this consultation. If you have any questions or concerns about this consultation or the consultation process in general, please feel free to contact me at (308) 382-6468, extension 18.

Sincerely,



Eliza Hines  
Acting Nebraska Field Supervisor

cc: NGPC; Lincoln, NE (Attn: Michelle Koch)