

## TIPS FOR PROVIDING EFFECTIVE COMMENTS

*Your participation is an important part of the decision-making process!*

Information received from the public and agencies during the scoping period helps agencies define the scope of analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement. Therefore, Western and RUS are interested in your comments on the Big Stone II Project. The following tips should help guide you to make effective comments that become part of the decision-making process.

- Submit your comments on potential impacts and ideas on project alternatives.
- Review agency websites, monitor local newspapers, attend public meetings and become familiar with the proposed project development.
- Provide substantive and concise written comments.
- Learn about the NEPA process and when in the process agencies will receive comments.
- Keep your comments focused on the proposed project being analyzed.
- Know who the federal agency decision-makers are.
- Submit your comments within the timeframes announced. This helps the agencies include all concerns in the NEPA documents.
- Make sure that you are on the EIS mailing list to receive notification of public meetings or project information, or both.



### Need More Information?

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# Big Stone II

A Western Area Power Administration Newsletter



## Project Manager's Corner

I am excited to introduce our first newsletter designed to keep you informed about the Big Stone II Project Environmental Impact Statement being developed by Western Area Power Administration. As the project progresses, future newsletters will focus on topics directly affecting the development of the Big Stone II EIS.

Seven utilities in the South Dakota and Minnesota area are proposing to construct a nominal 600-megawatt, coal-fired electric generating station and associated transmission system upgrades, called the Big Stone II Project. Project co-owners have applied for interconnection to the Federal transmission system owned and operated by Western. As the lead federal agency, Western, along with the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) as a cooperating agency, is preparing an EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, to analyze the potential for impacts to the environment and human resources that could result from project development. Before Western can agree to the interconnection, it must consider the project's potential environmental impacts.

Rural Utilities Service, under the US Department of Agriculture, works with rural utilities to provide funding for new utility infrastructure and expansion of services to rural communities. RUS may provide financing assistance to Great River Energy, one of the Project co-owners, for their portion of the project and has been designated a cooperating agency.

Public involvement is an important and integral part of Western's NEPA process. The public involvement process provides a means of identifying the concerns, needs and values of interested parties and I hope that you will participate in this project. I welcome your comments and suggestions. In the next newsletter we will update you on our proposed schedule and will continue to identify specific opportunities for your involvement.

Thank you for your interest in the project. Please let us know if you have any suggestions on how we can make this newsletter more useful to you. Comments may be sent to me at the address below or e-mailed to: [BigStoneEIS@wapa.gov](mailto:BigStoneEIS@wapa.gov).

Cordially,

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## Introduction to Western Area Power Administration

Western markets and delivers reliable, cost-based hydroelectric power and related services within a 15-state region of the central and western United States, an area covering 1.3 million square miles. Western is one of four power marketing administrations within the U.S. Department of Energy whose role is to market and transmit electricity from multi-use water projects.

Western sells power from 56 powerplants operated by the Bureau of Reclamation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the International Boundary and Water Commission. Together, these plants have a capacity of 10,261 megawatts. Western's customers include municipal utilities, rural electric cooperatives, public utility and irrigation districts and Federal and state agencies.

Legislation requires that those who benefit from Federal investments repay the U.S. Treasury, so Western sets power rates to recover all costs associated with its activities and with the power-related activities of the generating agencies. Power revenue must also cover the Federal investment in power and transmission facilities (with interest). At the same time, Western must certify that its rates are as low as practical, so Western's administrator and staff focus on sound business practices and cost containment.

### During Fiscal Year 2004 (Oct 2003—Sept 2004), Western:

- supplied hydroelectric power to 678 wholesale power customers;
- operated and maintained more than 16,938 miles of transmission lines, 272 substations and other related facilities;
- sold 39.6 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of power—enough to serve about 11 million homes for one year; and
- employed about 1,300 Federal employees and 300 contract workers.

For more information about Western and its activities, please visit [www.wapa.gov](http://www.wapa.gov).

### Public Scoping Meetings

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>June 14</b> | Lantern Inn<br>5 to 8 pm 1010 S. Dakota St., Milbank, S.D.                      |
| <b>June 15</b> | Best Western Prairie Inn<br>5 to 8 pm 200 E. Highway 28, Morris, Minn.          |
| <b>June 16</b> | Kilowatt Community Center<br>5 to 8 pm 600 Kilowatt Drive, Granite Falls, Minn. |

See "What is Scoping" on page 2.



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## What is Scoping?

**“Engaging citizens in policy making is a sound investment and a core element of good governance.”**

*(Organization for Cooperative and Economic Development Caddy & Vergez)*

Once a Federal lead agency has decided to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and the Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS is published, scoping begins. Scoping is the process of actively acquiring input from the

public and other interested Federal, state, tribal, and local agencies. Information gained during scoping assists the lead agency in identifying potential environmental issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures associated with development of the proposed project. The process provides a mechanism for “narrowing” the scope of issues, so that the EIS can focus the analysis on areas of high interest and concern. Therefore, public participation in the scoping process is a vital component to preparing a sound NEPA document. The scoping process provides the public and agencies opportunities for meaningful involvement in the decision-making process.

## Multiple Approval Processes Required for the Big Stone II Project

The proposed development of the Big Stone II Project, which includes construction of the plant facility and the transmission system upgrades, requires multiple state and Federal permits and approvals. The state and Federal permitting and approval processes will be conducted concurrently and will provide numerous opportunities for public input. Western encourages the public to participate in all processes needed to approve the proposed Big Stone II Project to make sure that decision makers hear your comments and concerns. The schedules are based on timeframes given in the Minnesota and South Dakota statutes. Actual schedules will vary as the project progresses. The timeline below illustrates when the various permitting processes are projected to occur and identifies opportunities for public input.

### Federal Process

The Big Stone II Project would produce electrical power that would interconnect to Western’s power grid. Rural Utilities Service may also provide one of the co-owners funding for the project. The interconnection and financial

funding are considered Federal actions subject to environmental review under NEPA. Under NEPA, Western is required to prepare an EIS to identify potential impacts as well as mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate impacts associated with development of the project. The EIS process for the Big Stone II Project began with publication on May 27, 2005 of Western’s official Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS. Completion of the EIS and the Record of Decision is expected to require 15 months.

### South Dakota Processes

The siting of the plant facility falls under the jurisdiction of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission’s (PUC) Energy Facility Siting Rules. The permit application is projected to be filed in July 2005. The process is expected to take approximately one year.

The portion of the proposed transmission lines located within South Dakota would also fall under the jurisdiction of the South Dakota PUC. The permit application to the South Dakota PUC is projected to be filed in November 2005, and the process is expected to take approximately six months.

### Minnesota Processes

Project transmission lines located within the state of Minnesota require a Certificate of Need (CON) through the Minnesota PUC which includes the preparation of an Environmental Report (ER) that is prepared under direction of the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB) on behalf of the Minnesota PUC. The PUC will issue the Final Decision. The CON Application is projected to be filed in late July or mid August of 2005, and the permitting process, per Minnesota statute, is expected to take approximately 12 months.

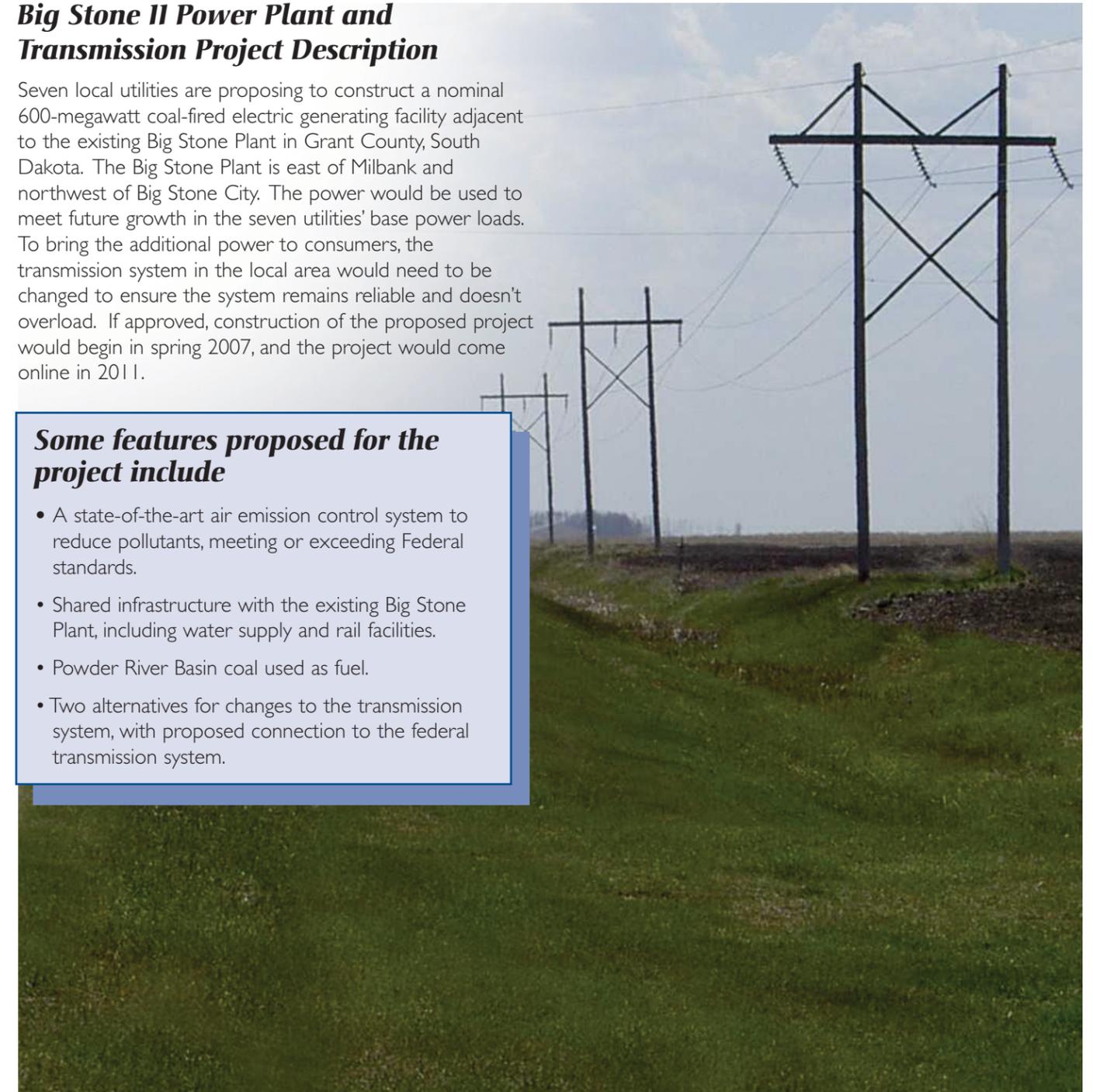
A Transmission Line Route Permit is also required from the Minnesota EQB. To comply with the permitting process, three-mile-wide transmission line corridors would be identified and a state EIS would be prepared to address the potential for impacts resulting from transmission line construction and/or upgrades. Application for the Transmission Line Route Permit is anticipated to be filed in September 2005, and the permitting process would take approximately 12 months.

## Big Stone II Power Plant and Transmission Project Description

Seven local utilities are proposing to construct a nominal 600-megawatt coal-fired electric generating facility adjacent to the existing Big Stone Plant in Grant County, South Dakota. The Big Stone Plant is east of Milbank and northwest of Big Stone City. The power would be used to meet future growth in the seven utilities’ base power loads. To bring the additional power to consumers, the transmission system in the local area would need to be changed to ensure the system remains reliable and doesn’t overload. If approved, construction of the proposed project would begin in spring 2007, and the project would come online in 2011.

### Some features proposed for the project include

- A state-of-the-art air emission control system to reduce pollutants, meeting or exceeding Federal standards.
- Shared infrastructure with the existing Big Stone Plant, including water supply and rail facilities.
- Powder River Basin coal used as fuel.
- Two alternatives for changes to the transmission system, with proposed connection to the federal transmission system.



Color Key	Q-2 2005	Q-3 2005	Q-4 2005	Q-1 2006	Q-2 2006	Q-3 2006	Q-4 2006
<b>Federal EIS Process</b>	▲ May 27 Notice of Intent	▲ Jul 27 Scoping Period Ends	▲ Oct Information Meeting	▲ Jan Public Meeting	May Final Hearing	Jul Briefs and Reply Briefs	Oct State Register
<b>South Dakota PUC Transmission Line Permitting</b>	▲ May 27 Scoping Period Begins	Jul CON Application Filed	Nov Permit Application	Mar Draft Minnesota EIS	May PUC Order	Jul Record of Decision	
<b>Minnesota CON (PUC) and ER (EQB)</b>		▲ Aug-Sep Comment Period (EQB)	Nov Federal Draft EIS	▲ Mar Public Hearings (PUC & EQB)	May Federal FEIS	▲ Jul Final Decision (PUC)	
<b>Minnesota Transmission Line Route Permit</b>		▲ Aug Comment Period (PUC)	▲ Nov-Dec Federal DEIS Public Review Period	▲ Mar Informational Meetings	▲ May Federal FEIS Comment Period	▲ Sep Board Decision	
<b>▲ Public Input</b>		Sep Application Submitted	▲ Nov Minnesota EIS Scoping		May Contested Case Hearing		
			Nov Environmental Report Completed				