

memorandum

DATE: OCT 24 2012

REPLY TO
ATTN OF: Linda Hughes (G0400), Phoenix, AZ

SUBJECT: Determination to Prepare an Environmental Assessment for Western's Gila North Gila Rebuild and Upgrade Project in conjunction with APS's North Gila to TS-8 Project, Yuma County, Arizona

TO: Darrick Moe (G0000), Phoenix, AZ

Western Area Power Administration, Desert Southwest Region (Western) proposes to rebuild and upgrade two, parallel, 4.8-mile-long transmission lines located between Gila and North Gila Substations and take land actions in support of portions of Arizona Public Service's (APS) construction of a new, 12.8-mile-long, 230-kV transmission line between North Gila and a proposed TS-8 substation in Yuma County, Arizona. Western's reconstruction action involves a portion of the wood-pole Gila Knob 161-kV Transmission Line, which would be upgraded to 230-kV and rebuilt on steel structures as well as the double-circuited, wood-pole Gila North Gila 69-kV Transmission Line, which would be rebuilt as an under-build on steel structures for the new APS line. Western's land action entails acquiring up to an additional 50 feet right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to the existing Gila Knob ROW, transferring a portion of the Gila North Gila ROW to APS, and granting APS the right for their new transmission line to cross Western's Gila Substation.

As we begin environmental activities, we request you approve the attached Determination to Prepare an Environmental Assessment. Mr. Matthew Bilsbarrow will be the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Document Manager for the Environmental Assessment (EA). If you have any questions, please contact me at extension 2524.



Linda Hughes
Environmental Manager

attachment

bcc:
G0400 (Hughes)
G0420 (Bilsbarrow)
G5636 (Rhoades)
(w/attachment)

FILE: 5440.04 GLA KNB & GLA NGA TL

DETERMINATION TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Name of Project: Western's Gila North Gila Rebuild and Upgrade Project in conjunction with APS's North Gila to TS8 Project

Location: Yuma, Yuma County, Arizona

Description of the Proposed Action: Western Area Power Administration, Desert Southwest Region, (Western), proposes to rebuild and upgrade two, parallel, 4.8-mile-long transmission lines located between Gila and North Gila Substations and take land actions in support of portions of Arizona Public Service's (APS) construction of a new, 12.8-mile-long, 230-kV transmission line between North Gila and a proposed TS-8 substation in Yuma County, Arizona. Western's reconstruction action involves a portion of the wood-pole Gila Knob 161-kV Transmission Line, which would be upgraded to 230-kV and rebuilt on steel structures as well as the double-circuited, wood-pole Gila North Gila 69-kV Transmission Line, which would be rebuilt as an under-build on steel structures associated with the new APS line. Western's land action entails acquiring up to an additional 50 feet right-of-way (ROW) adjacent to the existing Gila Knob ROW, transferring a portion of the Gila North Gila ROW to APS, and granting APS the right for their new transmission line to cross Western's Gila Substation. Western anticipates that U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will be cooperating agencies given their land management or permitting responsibilities.

Western's proposed action will increase the reliability and safety of the bulk electric system by replacing wood structures with steel ones, moving away from the 161-kV standard which is no longer commonly used, and efficiently using existing transmission line ROWs. The Gila Knob Transmission Line was built in 1943 and has been in service well beyond its projected useful life. The Gila North Gila Transmission Line was built in 1984. Western's customer, APS, determined that this project will increase reliability and meet current and future electric load on their system.

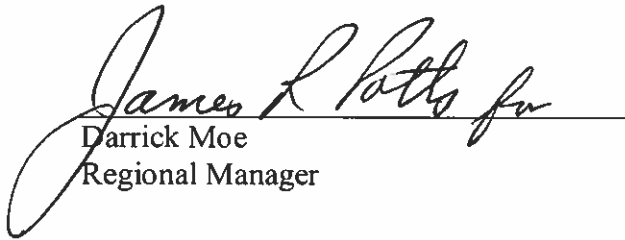
Western's action, per 10 CFR 1021.104, consists of: 1) rebuilding and upgrading two transmission lines with new steel structures as described above and 2) acquiring, transferring and granting rights-of-way as needed.

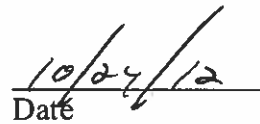
Class of Action from Department of Energy (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Regulations: Appendix B4.13 states "Upgrading or rebuilding approximately 20 miles in length or less of existing electric powerlines, which may involve minor relocations of small segments of the powerlines."

While Appendix B4.13 applies to Western's proposed action, an EA is warranted because of public concerns raised during two other recent projects involving these two ROWs and the presence of and likely impacts to floodplains or wetlands. Western received approximately 400 public comments during scoping and draft EIS review for the Rio Colorado/San Luis Project,

which is currently on hold. APS received approximately 500 public comments during outreach for their Certificate of Environmental Compatibility for the North Gila to TS-8 to Yucca 230-kV Transmission Line Project. DOE actions involving floodplains or wetlands, such as this one located partially within the Gila River's 100-year floodplain, require public notification, opportunity for public comment, and consideration of alternatives per 10 CFR part 1022. These requirements go beyond that of CX and match that of an EA. Section 1021.321 states "DOE may prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) on any action at any time in order to assist agency planning and decisionmaking."

Determination: Based on the provision in Section 1021.342 of the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures, I determined that an EA will be prepared to assess the impacts of the proposed action. Based on the EA analysis, either Western will prepare a finding of no significant impact and proceed with the action, or Western will prepare an environmental impact statement if the EA reveals the potential for significant environmental impacts.


Darrick Moe
Regional Manager


Date