6.0 Cumulative Impacts

NEPA requires the identification and consideration of incremental impacts that are related to the Proposed Action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable actions (40 CFR 1508.7). Consideration of such impacts is necessarily broad and includes on-site and off-site public and private actions that would be directly or indirectly related to the Proposed Action. Reasonably foreseeable future actions that could contribute to cumulative impacts include: the approved Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project, MDU T1 – T2 Reconductoring Project, Williston to Watford Rebuild Project, Watford to Charlie Creek Rebuild Project, the T2 230/115 Transmission Line Replacement Project, and ongoing oil and gas field development.

Construction, reconductoring, and rebuilding of lines in the area would result in some impacts that are similar to those identified for the Proposed Project. The Belfield to Rhame Project would have a greater contribution to cumulative impacts than reconductoring, rebuilding, or replacement projects because it would require new ROW, structures, and conductor. Reconductoring, rebuilding, and replacement projects generally are limited to the use of existing ROWs and possibly existing structures. Oil and gas field development also would require additional lands for well sites, access roads, and gathering lines.

Impacts that would be considered to contribute to cumulative effects of the Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project and the Williston to Tioga Transmission Line Project include the combined temporary impacts to approximately 570 acres within the two project areas. In combination, the two projects also would result in temporary impacts to nearly 300 acres of cropland and 231 acres of rangeland/grassland. Permanent cumulative impacts associated with the two projects would represent less than 0.4 acre of project area lands.

Construction and operation of the Williston to Tioga Transmission Line would contribute to the temporary and permanent loss of soils and minerals resources within western North Dakota. Although such impacts are relatively small, when added to other projects, such as oil and gas development, the installation of pipelines, development of wind energy projects, and construction of the Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line, they represent an overall loss of resources within the region.

Development and operation of the proposed Williston to Tioga Transmission Line Project, the Belfield to Rhame Transmission Line Project, and continued development of oil and gas production facilities would contribute to temporary and long-term impacts to terrestrial and avian species. In combination, habitat losses associated with such projects would more than double those of each individual project. However, such impacts, including the loss of habitat, would be negligible when compared to the amount available for use. Terrestrial species would be impacted as a result of loss of habitat and displacement and/or loss of species. Aboveground facilities such as conductor, static wires, transmission line structures, and oil and gas production equipment could contribute cumulative impacts to avian species as a result of collision. Aboveground facilities also would provide nesting and perching sites that could be used by raptors, thus increasing predation of prey species. Increased aboveground equipment also would contribute to cumulative visual impacts within some areas.

BEPC's Proposed Project would not result in impacts to hydrology, drainages, wetlands, mineral resources, cultural, Native American, paleontological, transportation, environmental justice, global warming, or socioeconomic resources. Therefore, it would not contribute to cumulative impacts to these resources associated with ongoing or reasonably foreseeable projects.

None of the expected environmental impacts of BEPC's Williston to Tioga Transmission Line Project were found to be significant, and it also is not anticipated that the cumulative effects, when considered with the development discussed above, would be significant.