

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
WYOMING STATE OFFICE**

Gateway West Geotechnical Drilling Project WYW175498-01

July 26, 2010

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
Wyoming and Idaho
Project Proponents: Idaho Power Company and Rocky Mountain Power**

**Wyoming State Office
Telephone: 307.775.6256
Fax: 307.775.6129**



BACKGROUND

Idaho Power Company and Rocky Mountain Power have requested a short term right-of-way to conduct geotechnical surveys on federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in Wyoming and Idaho. This drilling project would collect geotechnical soil property information for the design of foundations and support structures in association with the proposed route of the Gateway West electric transmission line. This transmission line would extend between the Windstar Substation at Glenrock, Wyoming, and the Hemingway Substation approximately 30 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. An environmental impact statement on the transmission line is currently being developed.

The applicant's purpose for the proposed action was initiated when the Application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands (SF-299 form) was submitted to conduct geotechnical sampling along the proposed route of the Gateway West transmission line project (including alternatives) from the new Windstar substation north of the existing Dave Johnston Power Plant at Glenrock, Wyoming to the new Hemingway substation southwest of Boise, Idaho. The need for the proposed action is to collect hydrogeologic and geotechnical soil properties for the engineering design of the proposed transmission line.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

On the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that: (1) the implementation of the Proposed Action will not have significant environmental impacts beyond those already addressed in the relevant Resource Management Plan (RMP) EISs; (2) the Proposed Action is in conformance with the RMPs for the respective Field Offices; and (3) the Proposed Action does not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement or a supplement to the existing environmental impact statement is not necessary and will not be prepared.

This finding is based on my consideration of the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) criteria for significance (40 CFR 1508.27), both with regard to the context and to the intensity of the impacts described in the EA or as articulated in the letters of comment.

Context

The project area extends across Wyoming and Idaho, collecting data from approximately 912 borehole locations along the 1,149 miles of proposed and an additional 873 miles of alternate transmission line routes. An estimated 35.53 miles of overland access would be used to access the borehole locations.

Intensity

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Gateway West Geotechnical Drilling Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Impacts to natural resources such as soils, vegetation and wildlife would occur at each borehole location, on each of the overland routes that would access the bore holes, and on a broader level within the affected habitats traversed by the project. These would be adverse impacts since the activity would damage or destroy natural resources, or would disrupt the natural biological processes or environmental setting by the presence of humans and operation of equipment used in completing the project. Because of the short time frame involved, and the small footprint of the individual borehole and overland routes, most of these impacts would be negligible.

Beneficial impacts would result from the data gathered and used in design of the transmission line towers. Some beneficial impacts may result from data realized through paleontological data gathering.

2. The degree to which the proposed action affects public health and safety.

Environmental protection measures have been identified by the applicant and incorporated into the proposed action to address health and safety of crew members as well as that of the general public living in or utilizing the public lands within the project area.

Noxious weeds and invasive species could be spread as a result of the project, but such spread would be minimized by the identified environmental protection measures.

3. Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity of historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.

Little or no impacts to unique characteristics of the project area are anticipated. Cultural resources were inventoried and sites avoided on all borehole locations and overland routes. Other ecologically sensitive areas have been avoided in the site selection process, or will be avoided through site specific implementation of the environmental mitigation measures. National Historic Trail segments and the trail setting will also be avoided.

4. The degree to which the effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.

Geotechnical drilling is a fairly common technique for data gathering. The nature of the project and the types and intensity of environmental consequences are fairly well understood. There should be little controversy over the effects of the project on the human environment.

5. The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

Geotechnical drilling as proposed does not involve uncertain, unique, or unknown risks.

6. The degree to which the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.

The Gateway West transmission line project is currently undergoing analysis through preparation of an EIS. The geotechnical drilling project does not set a precedent for approval of future action such as the transmission line project, but will provide needed data with which to properly design the transmission line.

7. Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

The proposed action is a data gathering effort to facilitate design of the Gateway West transmission line project, which is undergoing review under a separate EIS. The EA identified negligible contributions to cumulative effects on several natural resources including Canada lynx, Slickspot peppergrass, greater sage grouse, BLM sensitive plant species, biological soil crusts, vegetation, and noxious weeds and invasive plant species.

8. The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources.

All cultural resources will be avoided as part of the proposed action.

9. The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

A biological assessment of threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species was prepared for the proposal, and submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) for their review. The USFWS completed their review and issued a Letter of Concurrence with the findings in the biological assessment, reiterating the conservation measures proposed for the project.

Slickspot peppergrass (*Lepidium papilliferum*), was listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended effective December 9, 2009 (74 Federal Register 52014; October 8, 2009). Slickspot peppergrass is a plant species from southwest Idaho and has potential habitat occurring within the project area. The species and suitable habitat areas would be avoided during construction and operation. The resulting determination of effect is that the project "may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect" the slickspot peppergrass.

Because there may be short-term habitat disruption due to drilling in non-suitable Canada lynx habitats, the determination of effects for this species was "may affect, not likely to adversely effect" the Canada lynx.

There will be a "no effect" determination for all other threatened and endangered species. The environmental protection measures will be used to survey and avoid threatened and endangered species habitat.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.

All applicable laws and regulations will be adhered to—no threat of violations is likely.



for
Don Simpson
State Director
Wyoming State Office

August 4, 2010
Date