

Appendix F

Proposed Land Use Plan Amendments

- Appendix F-1: BLM Plan Amendments
- Appendix F-2: Forest Service Plan Amendments

Appendix F-1

Proposed RMP and MFP Amendments

Gateway West Transmission Line Project

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Submitted To:

Bureau of Land Management

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| ACEC | Area of Critical Environmental Concern |
| AOI | area of interest |
| BLM | Bureau of Land Management |
| BMP | best management practice |
| CA | Conservation Agreement |
| CFR | Code of Federal Regulations |
| EIS | Environmental Impact Statement |
| FLPMA | Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 |
| FO | Field Office |
| I | Interstate |
| KOP | Key Observation Point |
| kV | kilovolt |
| LUP | Land Use Management Plan |
| MFP | Management Framework Plan |
| MP | milepost |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| NF | National Forest |
| NHT | National Historic Trail |
| NOI | Notice of Intent |
| NRHP | National Register of Historic Places |
| NWR | National Wildlife Refuge |
| ORV | outstandingly remarkable value |
| Project | Gateway West Transmission Line Project |
| R. | Range |
| RMP | Resource Management Plan |
| ROD | Record of Decision |
| ROW | rights-of-way |
| SMA | Special Management Area |
| SR | State Route |
| SRBOP | Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area |

| | |
|-------|--|
| SRMA | Special Recreation Management Area |
| T. | Township |
| TES | threatened, endangered, and sensitive |
| USFWS | U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service |
| VRM | visual resource management |
| WECC | Western Electricity Coordinating Council |
| WSR | Wild and Scenic River |
| WWE | West-wide Energy |

1 Introduction

The Gateway West Transmission Line Project (Gateway West or Project) starts in Wyoming at the Windstar Substation and takes two paths to the Aeolus Substation—one that swings to the east (Segment 1E) and one (Segment 1W) that for the most part follows or parallels the West-Wide Energy (WWE) corridor and an existing 230-kilovolt (kV) line (proposed for reconstruction as Segment 1W[c]). It then proceeds as a double-circuit 500-kV line from Aeolus to Populus (though in Segments 2 and 3 with one of the circuits initially energized at 230 kV between the Aeolus and Anticline Substations). At Populus, the Project splits into two single-circuit 500-kV roughly parallel paths. Segments 5, 6, and 8 travel on a more northerly route toward the Hemingway Substation through the Borah and Midpoint Substations, while Segments 7 and 9 travel a more southerly route through the Cedar Hill Substation to the Hemingway Substation. Segment 10 provides an interconnection between the Cedar Hill and Midpoint Substations and also provides an interconnection between the more northerly and more southerly routes.

The Project crosses federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Actions that occur on these lands, including the granting of rights-of-ways (ROWs) under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), are guided by decisions recorded in the applicable Resource Management Plan (RMP) or Management Framework Plan (MFP) for each unit. The BLM has determined that, depending on the route selected, the proposed Project would not conform to certain aspects of the Casper, Rawlins, Green River, Kemmerer, Cassia, Jarbidge, Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (SRBOP), and Wells RMPs and with the Malad, Bruneau, Kuna, Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills, and Twin Falls MFPs. Approval of a project-specific proposal that is inconsistent with the existing land use plan requires that a land use plan amendment be completed (BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1)¹. Any decisions to amend a plan would be made concurrent with a decision on the proposed Project.

2 Planning Process

The planning action is to consider amending 13 BLM land use management plans (LUPs) as a part of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This action is being considered under the BLM 1600 manual guidance (BLM Land Use Planning Handbook H-1601-1), Wyoming State BLM instruction memoranda, and the planning regulations published as 43 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) (including 1610.5-5, Amendments). Scoping meetings have been held for this Project, where the public, as well as state, local, tribal, and federal governments, were invited to participate in the planning process. Public scoping was initiated with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register on May 16, 2008 (73 *Federal Register* 28425). The NOI was followed by a series of nine public meetings held in 2008. Four of these meetings were held in Wyoming and five were held in Idaho:

- Tuesday, June 3, 2008, in SRBOP, Idaho;

¹ BLM. 2005. Land Use Planning Handbook. BLM Handbook H-1601-1. U.S. Department of Interior. March 11.

- Tuesday, June 3, 2008, in Murphy, Idaho;
- Wednesday, June 4, 2008, in Pocatello, Idaho;
- Wednesday, June 4, 2008, in Boise, Idaho;
- Thursday, June 5, 2008, in Montpelier, Idaho;
- June 9, 2008, in Casper, Wyoming;
- June 10, 2008, in Rawlins, Wyoming;
- June 11, 2008, in Rock Springs, Wyoming; and
- June 12, 2008, in Kemmerer, Wyoming.

Multiple meetings were also held between 2008 and 2009 with private landowners located within 2 miles of the Project's Proposed Route and Route Alternatives. The public has been given the opportunity to comment on and provide additional information regarding the Project, including the possibility of BLM Plan amendments, during these meetings. This public input has brought to light additional issues and prompted more comprehensive analysis, which has been included in the Draft EIS.

A report (Land Use Plan Consistency Analysis, 2010) was compiled documenting compliance with the 20 federal land use plans that provide direction for federal lands crossed by the Proposed Action or Action Alternatives. This report was included as Appendix F in the Administrative Draft EIS submitted to the BLM and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service for review on March 15, 2010. From this analysis, needs for potential amendments were identified and analyzed based on planning issues and criteria.

2.1 Planning Issues and Criteria

The NOI listed the planning issues the BLM anticipated and invited the public, other federal agencies, as well as state, local, and Tribal governments to identify additional concerns or issues during scoping meetings and the comment period that followed.

2.1.1 Planning Issues

The issues identified through public scoping and used to develop alternatives are as follows:

- Objection to location on private lands ("If the project is for the general public good, it should be on public lands.");
- Reliability and proposed separation distances of transmission lines;
- Avoiding sensitive areas such as National Monuments and Wildlife Refuges, military operating areas, National Conservation Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), and State Parks;
- Effects to Native American traditional cultural properties and respected places;
- Effects to paleontological resources;

- Effects on wildlife habitat, plants, and animals including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species;
- Effects to visual resources and existing viewsheds;
- Effects to National Historic Trails (NHTs) and their viewsheds;
- Land use conflicts and consistency with land use plans;
- Effects to soils and water from surface-disturbing activities;
- Effects to agriculture lands;
- Effect on local and regional socioeconomic conditions; and
- Management of invasive plant species and effective reclamation

2.1.2 Planning Criteria

The following general planning criteria are being considered in the development of the proposed plan amendment:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA);
- Existing laws, regulations, and BLM policies;
- Plans, programs and policies of other federal, state and local governments, and Indian Tribes;
- Public input;
- Future needs and demands for existing or potential resource commodities and values;
- Past and present use of public and adjacent lands;
- Environmental impacts;
- Social and economic values;
- Public welfare and safety; and
- President's National Energy Policy.

3 Proposed Amendments

Amendments to BLM's management plans may be needed to bring the Project into compliance with the applicable RMPs and MFPs for BLM-managed lands crossed by the Project, depending on the final route selected. The final text of the amendment(s) would depend on final conditions of approval for the Project. Instances where the Project may not be in conformance with applicable RMPs and MFPs include:

- Developing a new ROW outside of approved corridors,
- Building additional roads where motorized access is limited,
- Crossing NHTs,
- Crossing ACECs,
- Crossing National Wild and Scenic River (WSR) eligible segments,

- Modifying wildlife habitat requirements,
- Allowing surface disturbance near scenic rivers,
- Allowing new roads near special status plant species,
- Changing VRM classifications, and
- Allowing incompatibility with established Visual Resource Management (VRM) classes.

Effects on visual resources were determined through the use of computer modeling, field visits, and site-specific knowledge by local BLM staff. The analysis and effects determinations on visual resources are documented in Appendix G-1 for the Casper, Rawlins, Green River, Kemmerer, Cassia, Jarbidge, SRBOP, and Wells RMPs and the Malad, Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills, Twin Falls, and Bruneau MFPs. These proposed amendments reference the analysis, maps of the locations (referred to as the areas of inconsistency [AOIs]), photographs, and simulations included in Appendix G-1. The visual analysis pertains only to the public lands, as the BLM does not establish visual management objectives for lands it does not administer.

3.1 Casper RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Casper Field Office (FO), including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Casper RMP approved in December 2007. The RMP identifies VRM classes and manages visual resources based on these VRM classes. Portions of the proposed Project are inconsistent with the Casper RMP.

3.1.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Casper RMP

The Project's Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segments 1E and 1W would cross through areas covered by the Casper RMP. Approximately 43 miles of segment 1E and 16 miles each for Alternatives 1E-A and 1E-C are within the Planning Area. Approximately 52 miles of 1W(a) and 38 miles of 1W(c) are within the Planning Area as well as the 16-mile Alternative 1W-A. Approximately 3.5 miles of Segment 1E, 4.6 miles of 1W(a), 4.9 miles of 1W(c), and 4.5 miles of Alternative 1E-C cross BLM-administered lands managed by the Casper FO. Segments 1W(a) and 1W(c) consist of a rebuild of an existing line for portions of their routes. Alternatives 1E-A and 1W-A are not on BLM-managed land. The location of the Proposed Route was identified to comply with Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC) requirements for siting transmission lines and to protect resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, threatened, endangered, and sensitive (TES) species, sensitive lands, cultural resources, and visual resources. A short portion of Segment 1E of the Proposed Route crosses land that may have wilderness characteristics.

Portions of the Project do not conform to the direction on managing visual resources provided in the Casper RMP and cannot be mitigated to the extent needed to be in conformance with the RMP; therefore, the Project could not be approved unless the RMP is amended. The amendment would be needed for new sections of the Proposed Routes 1W(a), 1W(c), and 1E or Route Alternative 1E-C if any of these are selected.

The Casper RMP **Decision 5019** (Casper RMP 2-30) emphasizes the following with regard to visual resources:

“Visual resource values will be managed under the VRM classes defined as mapped in the Casper Field Office GIS database. Changes in the number of acres within each VRM Class depict a balance between development activities and protection of visual resources. The foreground/middle ground of NHTs will be managed as Class II until inventories are completed. Trail segments contributing to the overall eligibility that have integrity of setting will be managed as VRM Class II. Where integrity of setting is lacking, the foreground/middle ground of NHTs, will be managed as Class III. Manage 367,151 acres of BLM-managed surface and 816,310 acres of federal mineral estate as VRM Class II. Manage 433,799 acres of BLM-managed surface and 1,211,145 acres of federal mineral estate as VRM Class III. Manage 560,627 acres of BLM-managed surface and 2,629,717 acres of federal mineral estate as VRM Class IV.”

The Segment 1E, 1W(a), and 1W(c) Proposed Routes cross approximately 1.9 miles, 0.7 mile (0.6 mile comprising the rebuilt line) and 1.3 miles (almost all of which comprises a newly constructed line), respectively, of areas classified as VRM Class II. Alternative 1E-C crosses approximately 1.2 miles of areas classified as VRM Class II. The proposed and alternative routes would not be consistent with management objectives of VRM Class II.

3.1.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Proposed Route includes Segments 1E, 1W(a), and 1W(c). 1E would be new single-circuit 230-kV lines. The Proposed Route 1W(a) would consist of a new transmission line from the Windstar Substation to about milepost (MP) 30 (approximately 2 miles north of where the route enters the Medicine Bow National Forest) and again from near MP 39 to the substation. Between these two points, it would consist of a rebuild of an existing 230-kV line. Proposed Route 1W(c) would consist of a rebuild of an existing 230-kV line from the Dave Johnston Power Plant to about MP 25 and from about MP 34 to the end of the segment. Between these two points, the route would consist of a new 230-kV line transmission line. Routes 1W(a) and 1W(c) follow the existing utility corridor southwest across scattered BLM-managed parcels through the eastern portion of the Bates Hole area; while the 1E line would run southeast from a point in the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests (NF; Section 24, Township [T] 30N, Range [R] 78W) to the Albany County line near the North Fork of the Little Medicine Bow River. The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figure A-2 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 1.

3.1.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Casper RMP

The Proposed Routes, Segments 1E and 1W(c), 1W(a), and Alternative 1E-C would require a plan amendment to the Casper RMP if selected. There is currently a Decision in the Casper RMP that protects visual resources in VRM Class II and VRM Class III with the following objectives (Casper RMP 2-29):

Objective HR:5.1 Class II: Retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change should be low. Management activities should be seen, but not attract attention of the casual observer. The basic elements of form, line color, and texture found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape should be repeated.

VRM Class III has the following objective:

Objective HR:5.2 Class III: Partially retain the existing character of the landscape. The level of change to the characteristic landscape should be moderate. Management activities may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Changes should repeat the basic elements found in the predominant natural features of the characteristic landscape.

Decision 5019 would need to be rewritten, permitting a one-time allowance for the project in some areas and changing the VRM classification in another, in order to approve any of these routes to allow development of this Project while staying in compliance with the Objectives of the RMP. The amended decision would read (new language is in italics):

“Visual resource values will be managed under the VRM classes defined as mapped in the Casper Field Office GIS database, *except include the reclassification of the 630 acres of VRM Class II land, associated with AOI C-1, to VRM Class III. A single-use visually altering action will be allowed for the Gateway West Transmission Line Project (0.1 mile 1W[c], 0.04 1W[a], 1.4 miles for 1E and 1.3 miles for 1E-C) without changing the VRM classification in AOIs C-2 and C-3.1 through C-3.4.* Changes in the number of acres within each VRM Class depict a balance between development activities and protection of visual resources.

The foreground/middle ground of NHTs will be managed as Class II until inventories are completed. Trail segments contributing to the overall eligibility that have integrity of setting will be managed as VRM Class II. Where integrity of setting is lacking, the foreground/middle ground of NHTs, will be managed as Class III. Manage *366,521 acres* of BLM-managed surface and *815,680 acres* of federal mineral estate as VRM Class II. Manage *434,429 acres* of BLM-managed surface and *1,211,775 acres* of federal mineral estate as VRM Class III. Manage *560,627 acres* of BLM-managed surface and *2,629,717 acres* of federal mineral estate as VRM Class IV.”

3.1.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Section 4.1.3.1. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Approximately 630 acres of BLM-managed surface lands (as well as 799 acres of federal mineral estate) in AOI C-1 would be reclassified from VRM Class II to VRM III.

This amendment would result in this area being managed at a lower protection level. Amending the RMP to lower the VRM classification may encourage additional development in the area; however, the new transmission lines would occupy the majority of the developable land under BLM management, resulting in little remaining room for additional development (see Section 4.1.3.1). In AOIs C-2 and C-3.1 through C-3.4, allowing the Project without changing the VRM class would preclude meeting RMP Objective HR:5.1 (maintaining the character of the landscape) but it would not change the management requirements for the area; therefore, future projects would still need to meet current direction.

Segment 1E of the Proposed Route and Alternative 1E-B would cross an NHT. Although this crossing is not on BLM-managed land, amending the RMP to allow the Project could impact the experience of trail users in AOI C-2.

Along Segment 1E of the Proposed Route, the transmission line would cross land that is core sage-grouse nesting area and crucial winter range for mule deer. In addition, it would permit construction within just over 0.5 mile of a historically active raptor nest. Proposed Route 1W(a) and Alternative 1E-C would also cross big game habitat, nesting habitat for sage-grouse, and would be within the 0.5 mile buffer for raptor nests, the majority of these occurrences are not on BLM-managed land. Except for AOI C-2, the proposed amendments are for areas adjacent to an existing powerline. Construction of the transmission line would result in additional impacts on wildlife, scenery, and cultural resources. These impacts are described in their respective sections of the Draft EIS.

3.2 Rawlins RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Rawlins FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Rawlins RMP; approved in December 2008. The RMP manages visual resources based on mapped VRM classes as shown on Map 2-50 of the Rawlins RMP. Portions of the proposed Gateway West Project do not conform to the Rawlins RMP; thus, an amendment to the plan would be needed.

3.2.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Rawlins RMP

The Project's Proposed Route and Route Alternatives would cross through areas covered by the Rawlins RMP. Approximately 8 miles of Segment 1E of the Proposed Route, 8.6 miles of Alternative 1E-B, and 21 miles of Alternative 1E-C cross land managed under the Rawlins RMP, as do approximately 22 miles of Segments 1W(a) and 19 miles of 1W(c) of the Proposed Route. Also, approximately 37 miles of Segment 2 of the Proposed Route, 9.0 miles of Alternative 2A, 2.5 miles of 2B, and 10 miles of 2C cross land managed under the Rawlins RMP. Approximately 12 miles of Segment 3 cross land managed under the Rawlins RMP.

The location of the Proposed Route was identified to comply with WECC requirements for siting transmission lines and to protect resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, TES species, sensitive lands, cultural resources, and visual resources.

Approximately 2.8 miles of the Proposed Route 1E and approximately 2.6 miles of the Alternative 1E-B cross areas mapped as VRM Classes II and III on Map 2-50 of the

Rawlins RMP. The portions of the route segments that cross VRM Class II areas do not conform to the RMP. In some cases, the Project may not conform to VRM Class III. The Rawlins RMP visual resource management goals are: “1) Establish VRM classes for the RMPPA;” and “2) Maintain the overall integrity of visual resource classes while allowing for development of existing and future uses.” Management actions for obtaining these objectives are: “1) Manage visual resources to meet the Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands. 2) VRM classes are designated as shown on Map 2-50 (Table 2-9 and Appendix 25).”

The Rawlins RMP VRM emphasizes the following with regards to visual resources:

“Class II

- Retains the existing character of the landscape
- Allows management activities to be seen; however, activities should not attract the attention of the casual observer
- Requires changes to repeat the basic elements of form, line, color, and texture found in the predominant features of the characteristic landscape
- Requires modifications to a proposal if the proposed change cannot be adequately mitigated to retain the character of the landscape.

Class III

- Partially retains the existing character of the landscape
- Requires that areas where a management activity causes changes in the basic elements (form, line, color, or texture) do not dominate the view of the casual observer
- Requires that changes remain subordinate to the visual strength of the existing character.”

The RMP management goal for the North Platte River Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) is to “Manage to ensure the continued availability of outdoor recreation opportunities associated with the North Platte and Encampment Rivers.” The associated management objectives are to:

- “1) Maintain or enhance recreation opportunities to accommodate existing niche activities, including hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, OHV touring, and other uses appropriate to the prescribed setting.
- 2) Mitigate conflicts with other resource values and uses as appropriate, in coordination and cooperation with affected interests.
- 3) Maintain or improve the quality of river-related recreational experience along the North Platte and Encampment Rivers to continue to provide high-quality recreational experiences and benefits to local residents and visitors to the area (Table 2-11).
- 4) Maintain, restore, and enhance areas within the North Platte River area to meet Wyoming Standards for Healthy Rangelands.”

Management Action 9 for the North Platte River SRMA management objectives states that:

“Surface-disturbing activities on public lands within 0.25 mile on either side of the North Platte River will be intensively managed to maintain the quality of the visual resource” (Rawlins RMP 2008: 2-27).

Segment 2 of the Proposed Route crosses the North Platte River SRMA area and therefore would not be in conformance with the RMP.

3.2.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Proposed Route includes Segment 1E, which would be a single-circuit 230-kV line, and Segments 1W(a) and 1W(c), which would each partly consist of a new single-circuit 230-kV line and a rebuild of an existing 230-kV line. Within the Rawlins Planning Area, 1W(a) is a new single-circuit 230-kV line and 1W(c) is a rebuild of an existing 230-kV line. The 1W(a) route runs south from the Natrona/Carbon County Line near the southeast corner of the Bates Hole area to the Aeolus Substation. Within the Rawlins Planning Area, the Segment 1E Proposed Route would run southeast from a point near the North Fork of the Little Medicine Bow River (near the Converse County line), then south, southeast, and west until reaching the Aeolus Substation. This route was identified because it generally avoids sage-grouse habitat. Alternative 1E-B would continue farther south and then turn west to rejoin the Proposed Route 1E. An alternative to the Segment 1E Proposed Route and Alternative 1E-B, Alternative 1E-C, follows the existing utility corridor, approximately 1,500 feet to the west of the existing line.

The Segment 2 Proposed Route would be a 96.7-mile-long 500-kV/230-kV double-circuit line that follows a west/southwest direction between the Aeolus and Creston Substations. The western 40 miles of the line follows a WWE corridor. Alternatives 2A and 2B are several-miles-long variations north of the Proposed Route. Alternative 2A was considered because it would follow an existing 230-kV utility corridor that is also a WWE corridor and a BLM-designated utility corridor, and it is a relatively direct route. Alternative 2B was developed to reduce visual impacts to an historic site, and Alternative 2C was identified by the State of Wyoming as a future utility corridor. The Proposed Route generally parallels a WWE corridor but is not be within the corridor for most of the route. Portions of each route cross lands that may have wilderness characteristics.

The Segment 3 Proposed Route would be a 56.5-mile-long, east/west, double-circuit 230/500-kV line that would run between the proposed Creston and Anticline Substations. It parallels a WWE corridor but is not within the corridor for most of the route.

The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figures A-2 and A-3 of the Draft EIS show the Proposed Routes and Route Alternatives for Segment 1.

3.2.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Rawlins RMP

The Segment 1E and 2 Proposed Routes and Alternative 1E-B would require a plan amendment to the Rawlins RMP if selected. There are management actions and objectives in the Rawlins RMP that protect visual resources. The management actions would need to be rewritten to allow the development of this Project. The Segment 1E

Proposed Route and Alternative 1E-B cross approximately 2.8 miles of land mapped as VRM Class II. 1E-B crosses an additional 2.6 miles of VRM Class II designated land after it separates from the joint route with 1E. The amended VRM direction would read (new language in italics):

“VRM classes are designated as shown on Map 2-50 (Table 2-9 and Appendix 25); however, 161 acres of VRM Class II will be reclassified in AOI R-2 to VRM Class III. The Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be allowed as a single-use visually altering action in AOI R-1, a portion of AOI R-2 and AOI R-3 without changing the VRM classification.”

Other requirements for VRM Class II would remain unchanged.

The Segment 2 Proposed Route crosses approximately 1.2 miles of land mapped as VRM Class III, which is also part of the North Platte River SRMA. Segment 2 would not be consistent with the visual resource direction for management of the North Platte River SRMA. The amended VRM direction for North Platte River SRMA would read (new language in italics):

“Surface disturbing activities on public lands within one-quarter mile on either side of the river will be considered on a case-by-case basis to maintain, to the extent possible the quality of the visual resource. The Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be allowed as a visually altering action without changing the VRM classifications in AOI R-3. Mitigation actions would aim to minimize visual disturbance to the river corridor.”

The Record of Decision (ROD) for the Rawlins RMP states: “Avoidance Areas: Areas to be avoided which may be available for location of ROWs and Section 302 permits, leases, and easements with special stipulations or mitigation measures. For such authorizations, the area’s environmental sensitivity and other feasible alternatives will be strongly considered.” The Proposed Route was identified because it would have less effect on sage-grouse habitat. The Draft EIS considers an alternative to the Segment 1E Proposed Route (Alternative 1E-C) that would not cross areas mapped as VRM Class II; however it would have a higher impact on other resource. Mitigation measures were developed to reduce impacts to visual and other resources (refer to Table 2.7-1 in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS).

3.2.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

The parcels proposed for VRM reclassification are relatively small and isolated from other parcels of public land. If either the Proposed Route 1E or Alternative 1E-B is approved, the ROW would occupy a portion of the parcels, and the transmission line separation criteria would preclude inclusion of other lines within these parcels. Other

development such as wind power is unlikely to be placed in such close proximity to the transmission towers and on small, isolated parcels (Section 4.1.3.3 of the Draft EIS).

VRM class designations are assigned based on the impact of the visual resource on the experience of the viewer. Altering the designation for convenience of sighting power lines could impact the ability of meeting VRM objective 2, as it could be seen as impacting the integrity of these visual resource classes. The amendment may also influence objective of “allowing for development of existing and future uses” Allowing the powerline in AOI-R1 without changing the VRM Class was recommended as the area is isolated and the project would seldom be seen (Appendix G-1, Section 5.2.1). Not altering the VRM class helps to maintain the area in its more wild state and enables siting of the line such that visual impact are minimized as much as possible. The presence of a transmission line, however, could impact how this area is assessed for future plan amendments.

Allowing transmission lines near the North Platte River could impact the visual experience and recreational opportunities within the SRMA in that it will detract from the “wild and scenic” experience of the river and shoreline. This would affect the ability of achieving management objectives 1 and 3 (see Section 3.2.1 above). Objective 4 for the SRMA may be impacted by limiting the restoration capacity of the North Platte River area due to the significant disturbance from natural conditions. Objective 2 would be impacted as presence of the project could potentially increase the need for mitigation of conflicts among the resource values and uses and thus increase effort required to obtain the objective.

Segment 1E and Alternative 1E-B cross the Fort Fetterman to Medicine Bow Road. Alternative 1E-B would cross the Rock Creek and Fort Fetterman Road. While these crossings are not on BLM-managed land, the northernmost crossing of the Fort Fetterman-Medicine Bow road is adjacent to two VRM Class II parcels that would be reclassified to VRM Class III. This could potentially have a visual impact on the experience of users of the Fort Fetterman Road, both for historic and scenic setting. While additional development on BLM-managed land is unlikely due to the small size of the reclassified parcels, the presence of a transmission line in an otherwise relatively undisturbed setting could impact future management of the resources on both private and public lands.

3.3 Green River RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Rock Springs FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Green River RMP approved on August 8, 1997. The RMP includes objectives for visual resources in the vicinity of the proposed Project. The RMP also includes objectives limiting disturbance of active raptor nests and sage-grouse leks. Project components and buffers would be within protective buffer distances listed in the RMP; thus, the proposed Project does not conform to the Green River RMP.

3.3.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Green River RMP

The Project’s Proposed Route along Segments 3 and 4, as well as Alternatives 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E, would cross through the Green River Management Area. Approximately

24 miles of Segment 3 are within the Planning Area, 10.5 of which cross BLM-managed land. Approximately 65 miles of Segment 4 are within the Planning Area, approximately 30 of which cross BLM-managed land. Alternatives 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E follow the same route within the Green River Planning Area, 3.5 miles of which cross BLM-managed land.

The location of the Proposed Route was identified to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, TES species, sensitive lands, cultural resources, and visual resources.

The Proposed Route is not in conformance with the direction provided in the Green River RMP for visual resources. Also, the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives 4B/4C/4D are not in conformance with RMP direction for wildlife resources. Therefore, the land use plan would have to be amended if any of these routes are selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Green River RMP has two Visual Resource Management Objectives: “1) maintain or improve scenic values and visual quality; and 2) establish priorities for managing the visual resources in conjunction with other resource values (Green River RMP1997, page 21).”

Management Actions for reaching these objectives emphasize the following with regards to visual resources:

“Projects and facilities will be designed to meet the objectives of the established visual classifications and appropriate mitigation will be included.

“Management actions on public lands with a Class II visual resource management classification must be designed to blend into and retain the existing character of the natural landscape.”

The Green River RMP objectives for management of wildlife and fish habitat are to: “1) maintain, improve, or enhance the biological diversity of plant and wildlife species while ensuring healthy ecosystems; and 2) restore disturbed or altered habitat with the objective to attain desired native plant communities, while providing for wildlife needs and soil stability” (Green River RMP 1997; page 24).

Management Actions for reaching wildlife objectives include the following:

“Project components, such as permanent and high profile structures, i.e., buildings, storage tanks, powerlines, roads, well pads, etc. are prohibited within an appropriate distance of active raptor nests. The appropriate distance (usually less than 1/2 mile) will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may vary depending upon the species involved, natural topographic barriers, and line-of-sight distances, etc. Placement of facilities, ‘on’ (very low profile) or below ground, and temporary disruptive activities, such as occur with pipeline construction, seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions within 1/2 mile of active raptor nests, in certain circumstances.”

“Aboveground facilities (power lines, storage tanks fences, etc.) are prohibited on or within 1/4 mile of sage-grouse breeding grounds (leks). Placement of facilities, ‘on’ (very low profile) or below ground, and temporary disruptive activities, such as occur with pipeline construction, seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions within 1/4 mile of leks, in certain circumstances.”

The Project, as currently designed, is not in conformance with these visual resources and wildlife requirements. The purpose of the proposed amendments is to modify the visual resource management actions and wildlife requirements, such that the granting of a ROW for construction of the Project would conform to the Green River RMP.

3.3.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

Segment 3 of the Proposed Route consists of a double 500-kV circuit line that follows an existing transmission corridor within the area managed by the Green River RMP. No alternatives were identified for this segment.

Segment 4 of the Proposed Route is 203 miles long and generally follows existing transmission lines. It consists of a double 500-kV circuit between Anticline Substation in Sweetwater County, Wyoming, and Populus Substation in Power County, Idaho. The Proponents are considering an alternative for Segment 4 that would replace the double circuit with two parallel and adjacent single-circuit 500-kV lines.

Within the Green River RMP boundary, the WWE corridor extends in a southwest direction and provides no feasible option for an east-west connection between the Anticline and Populus Substations. It was not practical to follow the WWE corridor in this area, and thus the Proposed Route deviates from this designated route. Proposed Route 4 route crosses 0.8 mile of BLM-managed land with a VRM Class II designation. The Proposed Route and the Route Alternatives considered within this area are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. A map of the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 4 can be found in Appendix A, Figure A-5 of the Draft EIS.

Four Route Alternatives to Segment 4 of the Proposed Route cross the Green River RMP area. Alternatives 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E all follow the same route within the Green River RMP area. They deviate from the Proposed Route approximately 14 miles from where the Proposed Route exits the western edge of the Green River RMP boundary. Within the Green River RMP boundary, these follow the same a general westerly direction.

3.3.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Green River RMP

The Proposed Route along Segment 4, if selected, would require a plan amendment to the Green River RMP regarding visual and wildlife resources, while Segment 3 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 4B, 4C, 4D, and 4E would require an amendment related to wildlife resources (raptor nests and sage-grouse leks). These amendments would be needed if either Proposed Routes 3 and 4, or Proposed Route 3 and Alternatives 4B/4C/4D/4F are approved to grant of a ROW for the Project across lands managed under the Green River RMP.

The management objectives in the Green River RMP for visual resources are 1) maintain or improve scenic values and visual quality; and 2) establish priorities for

managing the visual resources in conjunction with other resource values. These two of the management actions for obtaining these objectives would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended management action for visual resource impacts (changes in italics) would read:

“Projects and facilities will be designed to meet the objectives of the established visual classifications and appropriate mitigation will be included, *except for the Gateway West Transmission Line Project which will be allowed a one-time allowance for the construction of access roads, placement of towers and double-circuit cables between towers where it would otherwise be in violation of the existing visual classifications for the proposed segment 4 route.*”

“Management actions on public lands with a Class II visual resource management classification must be designed to blend into and retain the existing character of the natural landscape. *A one-time allowance to this requirement will be permitted for the construction and placement of the Gateway West Transmission line, allowing the powerline across VRM Class II designated areas on both sides of the Green River as well as one river crossing in sec 16, 20N 109W, if the proposed Segment 4 route is selected.*”

The Project is also inconsistent in regard to requirements for structures near active raptor nests and sage-grouse leks, and would require plan amendments to the Green River RMP to modify management actions. These proposed amendments would be needed to allow the granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Rock Springs FO. Management objectives in the Green River RMP for wildlife and fish habitat are to: “1) maintain, improve, or enhance the biological diversity of plant and wildlife species while ensuring healthy ecosystems; and 2) restore disturbed or altered habitat with the objective to attain desired native plant communities, while providing for wildlife needs and soil stability.” Additionally, “the objective for management of threatened, endangered, special status, and sensitive plant and animal species is to provide, maintain, or improve habitat through vegetative manipulation, mitigation measures, or other management actions including habitat acquisition and easements” Management Actions designed to protect raptor nests and sage-grouse leks would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended requirements in areas of breeding raptors (changes in italics) would read:

“Project components, such as permanent and high profile structures, i.e., buildings, storage tanks, powerlines, roads, well pads, etc. are prohibited within an appropriate distance of active raptor nests, *except for the Gateway West Transmission Line Project which will be permitted as a one-time allowance for the construction and placement of the transmission lines and towers.* The appropriate distance (usually less than 1/2 mile) will be determined on a case-by-case basis and may vary depending upon the species involved, natural topographic barriers, and line-of-sight distances, etc. Placement of facilities, ‘on’ (very low profile) or below ground, and temporary disruptive activities, such as occur with pipeline construction, seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions within 1/2 mile of active raptor nests, in certain circumstances.”

The amended requirement for activities near sage-grouse leks (changes in italics) would read:

“Aboveground facilities (power lines, storage tanks fences, etc.) are prohibited on or within 1/4 mile of sage-grouse breeding grounds (leks), *except where access roads needed for the construction and maintenance of the Gateway West Transmission Line Project would be within ¼ mile of leks.* Placement of facilities, ‘on’ (very low profile) or below ground, and temporary disruptive activities, such as occur with pipeline construction, seismic activity, etc., could be granted exceptions within 1/4 mile of leks, in certain circumstances.”

3.3.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.7.2.2 and 3.7.2.3 for effects on special status plant species; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status wildlife species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

For the majority of its length, the proposed powerline routes for Segments 3 and 4 within the Green River Planning Area parallel either existing powerline or road corridors.

The amendment for visual resources would impact the ability to meet RMP Objective 1. It would adversely affect the scenic values of the landscapes of the Green River and views from the Seedskaadee National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Segment 4 would cross the Green River approximately 4 miles south of an existing transmission line crossing and would create additional visual disruption. Allowance of this project may affect how the visual resources are prioritized in conjunction with management of other resource values and could lead to reclassification of the VRM Class in subsequent Visual Resource Inventories.

Amending the RMP to allow the Project could affect the ability of the BLM to meet the wildlife objectives listed in the RMP. Short-term disturbance to sage-grouse would result from road and ROW clearing and construction. In addition, towers may affect predation on sage-grouse over the long term. Disturbance from road use for maintenance activities could have negative effects on mating and use of the breeding grounds such as avoidance and agitation. Reduction of functional leks could result in a decrease in successful pairings and thus reduce the ability to meet objective 1. The habitat Objectives 1 and 2 could be affected as transmission line installation and associated new road construction would impact the ability to maintain, improve and restore habitat for wildlife species. The objective for management of threatened, endangered, or special status species would be affected as this amendment would allow for direct impact on breeding habitat of a special status species (sage-grouse).

The amendment allowing the construction of the transmission line towers within the buffer area for raptor nests could potentially impact up to 40 documented nests within the Rock Springs FO Planning Area. The impacts of this amendment, if approved, could be increased disturbance to nesting raptors, potentially leading to disruption in feeding times and flushing of the adult from the nest and possibly resulting in loss of

one or more young. The Project may impact up to 56 raptor pairs along the proposed Segment 4 route. The crossing of the Green River goes through Zone 2, as designated by the Wyoming Statewide Programmatic Bald Eagle Biological Assessment and Biological Opinion (August 2003) for bald eagle nests.

Mitigation measures, such as avoidance of areas during critical breeding/brooding times and micro-siting facilities to avoid impacting habitat to the extent feasible, would reduce the effects on raptors and sage-grouse. See Table 2.7-1 in Chapter 2 for additional mitigation actions and descriptions.

3.4 Kemmerer RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Kemmerer FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Kemmerer RMP approved on May 24, 2010. The RMP identifies areas where new utility corridors are not permitted, including NHTs and special wildlife habitat, and identifies VRM classes and objectives for visual resources. Portions of the proposed Project do not conform to the Kemmerer RMP.

3.4.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Kemmerer RMP

The Project would consist of one double-circuit 500-kV line between the Anticline Substation and the Populus Substation near Interstate 15 (I-15) in southern Bannock County, Idaho, a portion of which crosses lands managed under the Kemmerer RMP. This segment generally follows an existing transmission line corridor. The line would be constructed to double-circuit 500-kV design standards and both circuits would be energized at 500 kV. Appendix A, Figures A-5 and A-6 of the Draft EIS show the Proposed Route for Segment 4 in Wyoming and Idaho, respectively.

Segment 4 of the Proposed Route would use 500-kV double-circuit lattice towers between 160 and 190 feet tall (Appendix B of the Draft EIS, Figure B-3). In addition to the double-circuit 500-kV line, the Proponents are considering using two single-circuit structures in place of the double-circuit structures (Appendix B of the Draft EIS, Figure B-5). The double circuit (proposed) would require a 300-foot-wide ROW, while the two single circuits would require a 350-foot-wide ROW. The Project is needed to supplement existing transmission lines and relieve operating limitations, increase capacity, and improve reliability in the existing electric transmission grid.

The location of the Proposed Route was developed to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, TES species, sensitive lands, NHTs, other cultural resources, and visual resources. Several alternative route segments are also being considered (see below). However, the Project would not conform to the direction provided in the Kemmerer RMP. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Proposed Route and portions of several Route Alternatives would not be in conformance with the following requirements of the Kemmerer RMP:

“Decision 5010 – Heritage Resources – Protect the physical evidence of NHTs designated under the National Trails System Act (ruts and traces, graves,

campsites, landmarks) that exist on lands within federal jurisdiction by prohibiting all surface-disturbing activities that do not benefit the preservation and (or) interpretation of trails within the following distances: (1) Class 1 segments: ¼-mile on each side of trail segments and within a ¼-mile radius of gravesites and landmarks. (2) Class 2 segments: 500 feet on each side of trail segments and within a 500-foot radius of gravesites and landmarks. (3) Class 3 segments: 100 feet on each side of trail segments and within a 100-foot radius of gravesites and landmarks. Crossings at right angles to trails could be permitted on a case-by-case basis. This could require boring beneath the trail trace. (see Glossary for definitions of NHT and Class Segments).”

The indicative roads show new access roads would be needed within 0.25 mile of Class 1 segments of NHTs (four locations for Alternative 4A and one location for Alternative 4F).

“Decision 6008 – Historic Trails – Utility corridors are not designated where they are in conflict with NHT’s management objectives. High-voltage powerline corridors are established north of and parallel to I-80, and along Wyoming SH 89 from the junction of I-80 and the Wyoming state line.

Decision 6051 – VRM Class II areas – A visual corridor extending up to 1 mile on either side of the Sublette Cutoff and the Slate Creek Cut-off north of U.S. Highway 189 and east of Slate Creek Ridge in consideration of NHT views. The northwest portion of the Planning Area...”

Decision 6053 – VRM – Preserve the viewshed within 3 miles of the sites listed below, where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the site. ROW will be designed to preserve the visual integrity of the sites consistent with BLM visual resources handbook/manual. The management action is intended to manage developments to maintain setting qualities and not to have an exclusion zone.

- Emigrant Spring/Dempsey (11 acres)
- Alfred Corum and Nancy Hill emigrant gravesites (½ acre)

Decision 6054 – VRM – manage the viewsheds of NHT segments as follows:

(1)(a) Preserve the viewshed within 3 miles of Class 1 segments north and east of U.S. Highway 30 and west of the Hams Fork river (Tunp/Dempsey Trail area), where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the trail setting. Design ROW to preserve the visual integrity of the settings consistent with the BLM visual resources handbook and manual.

(1)(b) Preserve the viewshed within 1 mile of Class I segments outside of the Tunp/Dempsey Trail area and the checkerboard land pattern area, where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by

managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the trail setting. Design ROW to preserve the visual integrity of the settings consistent with the BLM visual resources handbook and manual.

(1)(c) On Class 1 trail segments within the checkerboard land pattern area, manage the viewshed to preserve the existing character of the landscape within the federal section where the trail occurs.

(2)(a) Preserve the viewshed within ½ mile of Class 2 segments that exist in blocked federal lands west of U.S. Highway 189 (south of Kemmerer) and south of U.S. Highway 30 by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not attract the attention of the casual observer.

(2)(b) On Class 2 trail segments outside of the area described in (2)(a) manage the viewshed to preserve the existing character of the landscape within the federal section where the trail occurs.

Decision 7014 – Rock Creek/Tunp Special Designations – Manage the Rock Creek/Tunp area of significant resource concern with the objective of preserving and enhancing the critical wildlife habitats and cultural values that occur within the area. Restrict all new ROW actions to existing disturbance zones. No net loss of habitat function allowed from any construction activity within the boundaries of the management area. Manage NHTs and sites settings and all surface disturbing activities to retain the existing character of the landscape in federal sections so developments do not dominate settings to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic period of use.”

3.4.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

Proposed Route: The Kemmerer subsegment of Segment 4 of the Proposed Route extends approximately 96 miles from the vicinity of Seedskaadee NWR to the Wyoming/Idaho border east of Bear Lake. The Proposed Route crosses the eastern boundary of the area managed under the Kemmerer RMP approximately 12 miles north of Highway 30 in Section 25, T. 20 N., R. 111 W. The route proceeds northwest to a point west of Fontenelle Reservoir where it turns west. The route proceeds in a generally westerly direction to the state border, the western boundary of the area managed under Kemmerer RMP. Resource issues include sage-grouse leks and core areas, Class I and II NHTs, VRM Class II lands, Special Management Areas (SMAs), the Slate Creek big game winter range area, and the Cokeville Meadows NWR. In addition, portions of the Proposed Route cross lands with wilderness characteristics.

Alternative 4A: This 85.2-mile-long alternative route separates from the Proposed Route at MP 68, 2 miles from the eastern boundary of the Kemmerer Planning Area. Alternative 4A follows existing transmission lines except for two short deviations in the vicinity of the two U.S. Highway 30/State Route (SR) 89 crossings. As a result, this route requires 13.0 miles of new ROW. Although this route maximizes paralleling of the existing 345-kV route, minimizes new ROW requirements, and affects the least amount of sage-grouse core area, it crosses more Class 1 and 2 NHTs, VRM Class II area,

crosses the Rock Creek/Tunp Special Designations area and the Rock Creek big game winter range area, is subject to Special Status Plant restrictions, and crosses a BLM-designated SMA. This alternative was specifically requested by the Office of the Governor of Wyoming² for detailed analysis.

Alternative 4B: This 100.2-mile-long alternative is based on the route alternative originally proposed by the BLM Kemmerer FO. Concerns about that alternative voiced by the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) were used to modify this alternative to change the crossing of the Cokeville Meadows NWR and avoid higher-quality wildlife habitats to the south. The route would depart from the Proposed Route at MP 52, near the Seedska-dee NWR and proceed in a generally westerly direction, crossing active trona mines to the area south of the intersection of U.S. Highway 30/SR 89 south of Kemmerer. The alternative would proceed north and then west, close to U.S. Highway 30/SR 89 and would pass close to the entrance to Fossil Butte National Monument. It would cross a small portion of a BLM-designated SRMA. Once across the Cokeville Meadows NWR, this route continues north for 16.0 miles, generally following the east side of the Wyoming/Utah and then the Wyoming/Idaho state lines. Alternative 4B angles northwest across the state line into Idaho north of Garret Creek. This route crosses Class II and III NHTs.

Alternative 4C: This 101.6-mile-long alternative is co-located with Alternative 4B to Section 30, T. 21 W., R. 118 W. where it turns west and then north, parallel to the east side of U.S. Highway 30/SR 89 and Cokeville Meadows NWR for 11.5 miles before turning northwest and crossing the highway and the NWR. The route turns north along the Idaho/Wyoming border for about 3.0 miles and then turns northwest across the state line. This alternative route would cross the NWR north of current NWR-managed lands, although still within the established boundary, the Bridger Creek and Rock Creek big game winter range, Class II VRM, the Bear River Divide and Rock Creek/Tunp Special Designations areas, and it would also cross portions of a BLM-designated SRMA along U.S. Highway 30/SR 89. This route crosses Class 3 NHTs. In addition, this route would be subject to Special Status Plant restrictions.

Alternative 4D: This 100.8-mile-long alternative is the same as Alternative 4B except within T. 21 N., R. 120 W. It varies in this area to increase the distance between the route and the Fossil Butte National Monument. Alternative 4D would be farther to the south. This alternative was requested by the manager of the Fossil Butte National Monument to reduce the visibility of the proposed transmission line as viewed from the monument. From point 4b.5 it would follow the same alignment as Alternative 4B and rejoin the Proposed Route at point 4j. This alternative route would cross Bridger Creek big game winter range and Class 3 NHTs. In addition, portions of the route cross lands that may have wilderness characteristics.

Alternative 4E: This 102.2-mile-long alternative is the same as Alternative 4D to point 4b.6. From point 4b.6 this alternative would turn north and follow the same alignment as Alternative 4C. This alternative route would cross Bridger Creek big game winter

² Office of the Governor of Wyoming. 2009. Letter to W. George, BLM, from A. Clark, Special Advisor to the Governor, concerning Gateway West Segment 4 NEPA alternatives. July 14.

range and crosses Class 3 NHTs. The portion of the route shared with Alternative 4D crosses lands that may have wilderness characteristics.

Alternative 4F: This 87.5-mile-long alternative was originally identified by the Proponents. However, over the course of several agency scoping meetings the Proposed Route was identified as having fewer impacts. The Proponents have adopted the suggested route and requested that the original route segment be carried through detailed analysis as a feasible alternative. Alternative 4F diverges from Alternative 4A (which follows an existing transmission line) at MP 512 of Alternative 4A. Alternative 4A continues to the south, following the existing transmission lines, while Alternative 4F stays slightly north of Alternative 4A, passing just south of Viva Naughton Reservoir. The route then turns north for about 5 miles, then back to the northwest for about 12 miles before rejoining the Proposed Route at MP 129.4. This alternative route crosses the Rock Creek big game winter range, Class 1 and 2 NHTs, Dempsey Ridge SRMA, and Class II VRM.

Structure Variation Alternative: In addition to the proposed self-supporting single-circuit steel lattice 500-kV structure, the Proponents are considering an alternative single-circuit 500-kV guyed structure for use where terrain, land cover, and land use allow. Typically, four guy wires about 140 feet long would be connected to the tower at a point about 100 feet up in each tower to four guy anchors spaced in a square around the tower (Appendix B, Figure B-6). The four guy wires are typically one inch in diameter and attached to 15-inch helical screw anchors, “screwed” into the ground.

3.4.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Kemmerer RMP

NHT Protection

The Kemmerer RMP protects NHTs. New access roads would occur within 0.25 mile of Class 1 segments (four locations on Alternative 4A and one location on 4F). The amended decision would read (new text in italics):

Decision #5010: National Historic Trails Physical Protection.

“Protect the physical evidence of NHTs designated under the national trails system act (routes and traces, grades, campsites, landmarks) that exists on lands within federal jurisdiction by prohibiting whole surface disturbing activities that do not benefit the preservation and or interpretation of trails within the following distances:

Class I segments: 1/4 mile on each side of trails segments and within 1/4 mile radius of gravesites and landmarks... Crossings at right angles to trails could be permitted on a case-by-case basis.”

The following amendment would be needed if one of these alternatives is approved:

Proposed Route: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project to cross the Dempsey Hockaday NHT in section 32, T 24 N, R 117 W

Alternative 4A: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project to cross the Sublette NHT in section 11, T 23 N, R 118 W

Alternative 4F: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project to cross the Sublette NHT in section 12, T 23 N, R 114 W.

Mitigation: Trails would be crossed at, or close to, right angles. Towers would be placed as far from the trail as feasible, or micro-sited to reduce visibility. No disturbance to trail traces permitted. Additional mitigation to be determined through the Section 106 process.

Utility Corridors

The Kemmerer RMP has guidelines for protecting NHTs when designating utility corridors. While it was determined that this decision did not constitute a requirement for an amendment, the FO recommended amending the decision for the designation of a utility corridor if either Alternative 4B or 4D is approved

Decision #6008: Utility Corridors Prohibited Across NHTs.

“Utility corridors are not designated, where they are in conflict with NHT's management objectives.”

An amendment is not required for any of the routes to be approved; however, the FO recommends designating a corridor for future utility placement if either Alternative 4B or 4D is approved:

Designate a utility corridor 1 mile in width, generally centered on the transmission line if either Alternative Route 4B or 4D is selected.

Visual Resource Management

The Kemmerer RMP Decisions 6051, 6053, and 6054 protect visual resources and determine visual management objectives for VRM Class II areas and Historic Trails and Places. These decisions would be rewritten to allow the development of this project.

The Proposed Route and Alternatives 4A, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, and 4F cross land mapped as VRM Class I. The transmission line would not be consistent with this VRM class.

Decision #6051: VRM Class II Designations

“VRM Class II areas:

A visual corridor extending up to 1 mile on either side of the Sublette Cutoff and the Slate Creek Cutoff north of U.S. Highway 189 and east of Slate Creek Ridge in consideration of NHT views. The northwest portion of the planning area....”

The following amendments would be needed if one of these alternatives is approved:

Proposed Route: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project without changing the VRM class for areas affected by the route.

Alternative 4A: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project without changing the VRM class for areas affected by the route.

Alternatives 4B, 4D: Reclassify the VRM Class designation to VRM Class III in the portion of the planning area south and west of U.S. highway 30 (the highway) beginning on a north-south line along the high ridgeline approximately ¼ mile west of the current active coal leases (west of the town of Kemmerer);

south along the high ridgeline to the ridgeline behind the active coal leases in T21N, R117W, Sec 25; then west following the high points of the topography approximately 3 miles south of the highway to T21N, R118W, Sec 28; then north-west following the high points of the topography within approximately 3 miles of the highway to T21N, R118 W, Sec 18; then north-west following the high points to within approximately ½ mile of the highway in T21N, R118W, Sec 12; then west to the junction of U.S. Highway 30/State Highway 89.

Alternative routes 4C, 4E: Reclassify the VRM Class designation to VRM Class III in the portion of the planning area south and west of U.S. highway 30 (the highway) beginning on a north-south line along the high ridgeline approximately ¼ mile west of the current active coal leases (west of the town of Kemmerer); south along the high ridgeline to the ridgeline behind the active coal leases in T21N, R117W, Sec 25; then west following the high points of the topography approximately 3 miles south of the highway to T21N, R118W, Sec 28; then north-west following the high points of the topography within approximately 3 miles of the highway to T21N, R118 W, Sec 18; then north-west following the high points to within approximately ½ mile of the highway in T21N, R118W, Sec 12; then west to the junction of U.S. Highway 30/State Highway 89. For routing north and east of highway 30/State Highway 89, permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project without changing the VRM class for areas affected by the route.

Alternative 4F: Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project without changing the VRM class for areas affected by the route.

Mitigation: Where the route would be visible on timbered slopes, limit tree to those portions of the right-of-way where it is required for safety rather in order to avoid creating a linear feature on the landscape. Vegetation removal requirements will consider Appendix A, Key Standards Relating to Electric System Reliability and Safety, of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Edison Electric Institute (2006)³.

In specific sensitive areas (such as VRM Class II, erosive soils, steep slopes, areas near NHTs), the access road used for construction will be restored and an alternative access route for operations designated.

Mitigation for NHT crossings will be determined through the 106 process. These measures may include micro-siting to place the line behind topographic features, replacing insulators with new ones made of non-reflective materials, and replacing conductors using non-specular wire to reduce visibility from Key Observation Points (KOPs) in highly visible places. This mitigation measure would be implemented once the Gateway West lines are operational. These mitigation measures would be especially pertinent where the new transmission line is visible from NHTs in the locations listed below (depending on the selected route).

³ Edison Electric Institute. 2006. Memorandum of Understanding Among the Edison Electric Institute and the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management Fish and Wildlife Service National Park Service and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Available online at: http://www.ivmpartners.org/eei_mou.pdf.

Proposed Route: (1) Within view of Class 1 segment of Sublette NHT in the valley and on the south side of Fontenelle Creek; and (2) Within view of two variants of Class 2 Slate Creek NHT west of Fontenelle Townsite.

Alternative 4A: (1) Within view of White Hill on Class 1 Sublette NHT on the west side of the Hams Fork River valley, where the routes would create a visual impact where they are co-located on top of Commissary Ridge and where they cross the valley; (2) Within view of the Class 1 Sublette NHT on top of Dempsey, Tunp, Rock Creek & Stoffer Ridges, in Rock Creek Valley, and in Sublette Flats where the route would create a dominant visual impact where it crosses the ridges. Where structures are proposed in deeply incised valleys not dominantly visible from the trail, special design characteristics would not be required; and (3) Within view of three variants of Class 2 Sublette NHT in T23N, R116W, federal Sections 32 (all) and 33 (S½).

Alternative 4F: (1) Within view of White Hill on Class 1 Sublette NHT on the west side of the Hams Fork River valley, where the Route 4F would create a visual impact where they are co-located on top of Commissary Ridge and where it crosses the valley; (2) Within view of the Class 1 Sublette NHT on top of Dempsey and Rock Creek Ridges and Tunp Range, and in Sublette Flats where the route would create a dominant visual impact where it crosses the ridges. Where structures are proposed in deeply incised valleys not dominantly visible from the trail, special design characteristics would not be required; (3) Within view of the Class 1 Dempsey-Hockaday NHT in Dempsey Basin where the route would create a dominant visual impact, especially at the crest of the Hams Fork Plateau; and (4) Within view of three variants of Class 2 Sublette NHT in T23N, R116W, federal Sections 32 (all) and 33 (S½), where co-located with Route 4A.

The Proposed Route would cross within 3 miles of designated National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) sites and thus may impact the ability to preserve their viewsheds.

Decision # 6053: Designated National Register Sites Viewshed Preservation

“Preserve the viewshed within 3 miles of the sites listed below, where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the site. ROW will be designed to preserve the visual integrity of the sites consistent with BLM visual resources handbook/manual. The management action is intended to manage developments to maintain setting qualities and not to have an exclusion zone....”

The following amendment would be needed if the Proposed Route is approved:

Permit a one-time allowance for Gateway West Project if micro-siting cannot reduce impacts to a level that meets the RMP Decision requirements.

Mitigation to be determined through the 106 process.

The Proposed Route, Alternative 4A, or Alternative 4F would be within 3 miles of NHTs and thus could have an impact on the ability to manage Class 1 and Class 2 NHT segment viewsheds as described in the Kemmerer RMP.

Decision # 6054: Class 1 & 2 NHT Viewshed Preservation

“Manage the viewsheds of NHT segments as follows:

(1)(a) Preserve the viewshed within 3 miles of Class 1 segments north and east of U.S. Highway 30 and west of the Hams Fork river (Tunp/Dempsey Trail area), where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the trail setting. Design ROW to preserve the visual integrity of the settings consistent with the BLM visual resources handbook and manual.

(1)(b) Preserve the viewshed within 1 mile of Class 1 segments outside of the Tunp/Dempsey Trail area and the checkerboard land pattern area, where the visual characteristics of the setting contribute to the eligibility of the site, by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not dominate the visible area to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic time period of the trail setting. Design ROW to preserve the visual integrity of the settings consistent with the BLM visual resources handbook and manual....

(2)(a) Preserve the viewshed within ½ mile of Class 2 segments that exist in blocked federal lands west of U.S. Highway 189 (south of Kemmerer) and south of U.S. Highway 30 by managing projects in federal sections to retain the existing character of the landscape so developments do not attract the attention of the casual observer.

(2)(b) On Class 2 trail segments outside of the area described in (2)(a) manage the viewshed to preserve the existing character of the landscape within the federal section where the trail occurs.

(2)(c) On Class 3 segments, manage the viewshed according to the appropriate VRM class for the area.”

The following amendment would be needed if the Proposed Route, Alternative 4A, or Alternative 4F is approved:

Permit a one-time allowance for the Gateway West Project where it would otherwise be in conflict with the historic viewshed preservation management actions. Micro-siting and mitigation measures would be required to minimize visual impacts to affected historic sites and trail segments.

Mitigation to be determined through the 106 process.

Special Management Areas

Alternatives 4A, 4C, and 4E would cross the Rock Creek/Tunp area of significant resource concern. This area currently restricts new ROWs and surface-disturbing activities to protect the natural and historic character of the area.

Decision # 7014: Special Management Areas

“Manage the Rock Creek/Tunp area of significant resource concern with the objective of preserving and enhancing the critical wildlife habitats and cultural values that occur within the area.

- Restrict all new ROW actions to existing disturbance zones.
- No net loss of habitat function allowed from any construction activity within the boundaries of the management area. Successful re-establishment or improvement of habitats could offset any new disturbance areas.
- Pursue opportunities to reclaim existing roads not necessary to attain management objectives.
- Restrict OHV use to existing roads and trails. No off-trail travel is allowed without prior approval from the authorized officer.
- Manage NHTs and sites, settings, and all surface-disturbing activities to retain the existing character of the landscape in federal sections so developments do not dominate settings to detract from the feeling or sense of the historic period of use.....”

The following amendment would be needed if Alternative 4A, 4C, or 4E is approved:

Permit a one-time allowance for the Gateway West Project where it would otherwise be in conflict with the management objectives of Decision 7014. Micro-siting and mitigation measures would be required to minimize impact to affected areas and resources.

Mitigation: Where the route would be visible on timbered slopes, limit tree to those portions of the right-of-way where it is required for safety in order to avoid creating a linear feature on the landscape. Vegetation removal requirements will consider Appendix A, Key Standards Relating to Electric System Reliability and Safety, of the Memorandum of Understanding with the Edison Electric Institute (2006).

In specific sensitive areas (such as VRM Class II, erosive soils, steep slopes, areas near NHTs) the access road used for construction will be restored and an alternative access route for operations designated.

Consider micrositing to place the transmission line behind topographic features to reduce visibility from sensitive areas, replacing insulators on the Bridger Powerlines with new ones made of non-reflective materials, and replacing conductors on the Bridger Powerlines using non-specular wire to minimize their visibility from KOPs in highly visible places. This mitigation measure would be implemented once the Project lines are operational. This mitigation measure would apply where the selected route is in conflict with NHT viewshed requirements.

Mitigation for sage-grouse will be determined by the USFWS. This may include measures such as: modifying fences within one mile of the transmission line with FireFly Grouse Flight diverters or other similar fence diverters to prevent sage-grouse mortalities and implementing site-specific reclamation such as transplanting sagebrush seedlings in sage-grouse habitat.

Additional mitigation to be determined through the 106 process.

3.4.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.7.2.2 and 3.7.2.3 for effects on special status plant species, Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status wildlife species; and Section 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

These amendments would impact the ability to meet the RMP objectives of preserving historic sites and viewsheds. A one-time allowance permits the construction of an otherwise contradictory use for management goals. The presence of a high-power transmission line within view of NHTs and historic sites would adversely affect visitor experiences and historic character of the landscape. Mitigation measures such as use of non-reflective materials and micrositing would aim to reduce the impact of the Project on trail users. The transmission line would cross the NHT, and thus would impact the historic character of place at the crossing location. Mitigation and micrositing would be used to limit this impact; however, at the crossing location, Project components would be visible to users of the trail.

Allowing the Project to cross the Rock Creek/Tunp area of significant resource concern could have impacts on the resources this area was designated to protect. The presence of Project components could directly impact sage-grouse by disturbing habitat and mortality through collision with project structures. Mitigation measures such as implementing site-specific reclamation for improving sage-grouse habitat and modifying fences with flight diverters would be implemented to reduce Project impacts to sage-grouse in these areas. Impacts to cultural and historic resources could be partly mitigated by micro-siting tower placement to minimize impacts to sensitive areas. Additional mitigations could include replacing insulators and conductors on the Bridger Powerline to reduce the current impacts of the existing powerline and thus mitigate for the additional impacts of an additional powerline in the same area. The Project components would be composed of non-reflective materials.

Land clearance for ROWs would result in loss of forest cover, increased fragmentation and edge habitat; which would impact wildlife by changing the ratio of cover to open space. Loss of nesting and perching habitat would occur as well as cover from predators. These effects on wildlife are further discussed in Sections 3.10 and 3.11 of the Draft EIS.

In areas where the VRM class is changed from Class II to Class III, an amendment would result in the area being managed at a lower protection level. Amending the RMP to lower the VRM classification may encourage additional development in the area.

Allowing the construction of a transmission line under a one-time allowance without changing the VRM class would affect the ability to meet VRM Class II management goals for the area; however, maintaining VRM Class II provides protection from additional development. Future projects would be required to go through an amendment process.

Approving an amendment to create an east/west corridor across the FO (which is proposed if either Alternative 4B or 4D is selected) would encourage additional development in that corridor (and away from other areas).

Mitigation measures for the Proposed Project are included in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS and address many of the impacts incurred by construction and maintenance of the powerline.

3.5 Malad MFP Amendment

Decisions recorded in the Malad MFP (1981) guide actions that occur within its Planning Area on lands managed by the Pocatello FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA. The MFP confines new ROWs to existing utility corridors and protects scenic and cultural resources. Portions of the Project are proposed outside of existing utility corridors and the Project would impact scenic resources; thus, the proposed Project does not conform to the MFP and an amendment would be needed to allow construction of the Proposed Route or an alternative in their current alignment.⁴

3.5.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Malad MFP

Approximately 42 miles of Segment 5 is within the Malad MFP Planning Area, 10 miles of which cross BLM-managed land. Approximately 36 miles of Segment 7 is within the Malad MFP Planning Area, 7 miles crossing BLM-managed land. Alternatives 5A (10.4 miles), 5B (9 miles), 7A (7 miles), 7B (7.5 miles), and the joint 7H and 7I (6.5 miles) routes all cross the BLM-managed lands of the Malad MFP. While Alternatives 5C, 5D, and 5E cross this area as well, they do not cross through BLM-administered lands within the Malad MFP.

The location of the Proposed Route was identified to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. These resources include, but are not limited to, TES species, sensitive lands, cultural resources, and visual resources.

Because the Project is not consistent with the Malad MFP, land use plan amendments would be needed if the Proposed Routes for Segments 5 and 7 or Alternatives 7A, 7B, 5A, or 5B are selected. Segments 5 and 7 as well as Alternatives 7a, 7B, 5A, and 5B would all require an amendment for ROW allowance. Segment 5 crosses 2 miles of VRM Class II and 2.8 miles of VRM Class III land and would not be consistent with the visual management goals for these parcels. Segment 7 crosses 1.3 miles VRM II and 2.9 miles VRM Class III land and would not be consistent with the visual management goals for these parcels. The remaining alternatives located within the Malad MFP

⁴ The Pocatello FO is in the process of preparing a new RMP; if approved, it would replace the Malad MFP. The ROW restriction is not carried forward in the proposed RMP; however, until a new RMP is approved, the management direction in the 1981 Malad MFP applies.

boundary are either not located on BLM-administered lands, or would not require a plan amendment. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Malad MFP management objective L.2 for new utilities emphasizes the following:

“Future major utilities will be routed across public lands within the corridor systems as located.”

The Malad MFP management objective for Visual Resources emphasizes the following:

“Specific development proposals will be allowed, located and designed in accordance with the existing VRM class restrictions with emphasis on Class I areas.”

The Malad MFP management objective for Cultural Resources emphasizes the following:

“Establish a protective corridor of 330 feet on visible segments of the Hudspeth Cutoff Trail. Continue adequate stipulation on permits, leases etc. to protect the trail.”

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to 1) allow ROW utilities outside existing corridors, 2) modify the VRM class objectives, and 3) modify protections of historic trails. The amendments would allow the Project to conform to the Malad MFP.

3.5.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Proposed Routes along Segments 5 and 7 as well as Alternatives 5A, 5B, 5C, 5D, 5E, 7A, 7B, 7H, and 7I cross through the Malad MFP (however, Alternatives 5C, 5D, and 5E do not cross through BLM-administered lands within the Malad MFP). The Proposed Route along Segment 5 includes one 54.6-mile-long (approximately 42 miles of which is within the Malad MFP Planning Area, 10 miles crossing BLM land) single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the Populus Substation and the Borah Substation, located southwest of American Falls, Idaho. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the Malad Hills MFP. The Proposed Route along Segment 7 includes one 118.1-mile-long (approximately 36 miles of which is within the Malad MFP Planning Area, 7 miles crossing BLM managed land) single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the Populus Substation and the Cedar Hills Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and the Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figures A-7 and A-9 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segments 5 and 7, respectively.

As stated earlier, only Segments 5 (10 miles) and 7 (7 miles) of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 5A (10.4 miles), 5B (9 miles), 7A (7 miles), 7B (6.5 miles), 7H, and 7I cross through BLM-administered lands within the Malad MFP. The Proposed Route along Segment 5 enters lands managed by the Malad MFP west of Robin. This route proceeds in a westerly direction through the Deep Creek Mountains and then turns north towards Borah Substation. Alternatives 5A and 5B are located roughly parallel to

and south of the Proposed Route through the Deep Creek Mountains. These alternatives impact more private land but avoid high-quality forested habitat and VRM Class II lands.

The Proposed Route along Segment 7 parallels Segment 5 from the eastern boundary of lands within the Malad planning area through the Deep Creek Mountains. Segment 7 then continues in a westerly direction and leaves the Malad planning area between Rockland and Heglar's Canyon. Alternatives 7A and 7B parallel Alternatives 5A and 5B through the Deep Creek Mountains prior to turning in a northwesterly direction towards their interception with Proposed Route along Segment 7. Alternatives 7I and 7J were proposed by the Southern Idaho Task Force to avoid private agricultural lands that would be impacted along the Proposed Route, while Alternative 7H was proposed by the Proponents to avoid the natural resources that would be impacted by Alternative 7I (although 7H, 7I, and 7J cross approximately 5 miles of BLM-administered lands within the Malad planning area, no plan amendments would be needed for these routes).

3.5.3 Proposed Plan Amendments to the Malad MFP

The Proposed Routes along Segment 5 and Segment 7, as well as Alternatives 5A, 5B, 7A, and 7B, would require a plan amendment to the Malad MFP, depending on which routes, if any, are selected, to grant a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Pocatello FO.

The Malad MFP limits new ROW to existing corridors; therefore, an amendment would be needed for Segments 5 and 7 of the Proposed Route, as well as Alternatives 5A, 5B, 7A, or 7B. This decision would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended decision (changes in italics) for the ROW would read:

“Future major utilities will be routed across public lands within the corridor systems as located, *except allow the Gateway West Transmission Line Project.*”

The Malad MFP provides protection for VRM classification, with special emphasis on Class I areas. This protection would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. Segments 5 and 7 of the Proposed Route cross areas classified as VRM Class II and VRM Class III where the pipeline would not be consistent with the VRM objectives for these classes. Segment 5 also crosses a VRM Class II parcel adjacent to the Snake River; however, analysis by showed that the area that would be crossed is inundated, and thus the Pocatello FO determined no amendment would be needed. The amended MFP decision (changes in italics) for the ROW would read:

“Specific development proposals will be allowed, located and designed in accordance with the existing VRM class restrictions with emphasis on Class I areas *with the following changes. The Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be permitted as a one-time allowance without changing the VRM Class II designation for AOI M-1 and Class III designation for AOI M-3.*”

Proposed Routes along Segments 5 and 7, as well as Alternatives 5A and 7A, may require an amendment to MFP objectives that protect cultural/scenic resources. This protection would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended MFP decision (changes in italics) for the ROW would read:

“Establish a protective corridor of 330 feet on visible segments of the Hudspeth Cutoff Trail. Continue adequate stipulation on permits, leases etc. to protect the trail, *except allow the Gateway West Transmission Line Project.*”

3.5.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.7.2.2 and 3.7.2.3 for effects on special status plant species; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status wildlife species; and Section 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

These amendments may impact the ability to meet management objectives. Allowing additional utility corridors would result in impacts to the resources outside of those designated areas. These include impacts to wildlife, vegetation, soils, water, and cultural and visual resources.

The Proposed and Alternative Routes would cross big game crucial winter range for deer, and Alternative 5C would cross crucial winter range for elk. A bald eagle nest would be within 1 mile of Segment 5 of the Proposed Route and Alternative 5C. Steep terrain would mean a high risk of soil erosion during construction activities for portions of the route through this area. Proposed Route 5 would come within 1 mile of the Bowen Canyon Bald Eagle Sanctuary, resulting in the potential for indirect effects due to noise and dust disturbance. Stream crossings could result in increased sedimentation in rivers during construction and extreme events which could affect spawning and rearing success for aquatic organisms downstream.

Amending the VRM classification to allow the Project would result in a disruption of the scenic quality in the parcels crossed. Views of the Deep Creek Mountains, the Snake River, and views from the Arbon Valley would all be affected by this amendment. The transmission line would be visible and in contrast to the scenic quality of the surrounding landscape. Recreational users at beaches and boating areas around American Falls Reservoir, and Massacre Rocks State Park would be affected due to additional human-made intrusions on scenic views (a large pipeline bridge crosses the river 200 yards east of the proposed transmission line crossing), while the presence of the transmission lines could affect the historic surroundings for visitors to the Oregon NHT.

While construction of a powerline under one-time allowance without changing the VRM class would affect the ability to meet the MFP objectives, it would maintain existing restrictions on additional development. Future projects would be required to go through an amendment process and additional impacts would be analyzed.

3.6 Cassia RMP Amendment

The Cassia RMP, approved on January 24, 1985, guides actions that occur on lands managed by the Burley FO south of the Snake River in south-central Idaho. These actions include the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA. The RMP limits new ROW to existing facilities/localities within Management Area 11 (Cotterel Mountain).

Management objectives have also been developed for scenic resources in the Goose Creek Travel Zone and VRM Class objectives; thus, the proposed Project is not consistent with the Cassia RMP.

3.6.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Cassia RMP

Approximately 70 miles of Segment 7 of the Proposed Route would be within the Cassia RMP Planning Area, 7.5 miles of which would cross BLM-managed land. Alternative 7E crosses approximately 1.9 miles of BLM-managed land. Approximately 80 miles of Alternative 7H (38 miles on BLM-managed land) and 73 miles of Alternatives 7I and 7J (43 miles on BLM-managed land within the Cassia FO) would cross the Cassia RMP Planning Area. The Project's Proposed Route and Route Alternatives would cross through multiple Management Areas designated by the Cassia RMP, including Management Areas 2 through 13. Because Segment 7 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 7E, 7H, 7I, and 7J are not in conformance with the direction provided in the Cassia RMP, the plan would need to be amended if any of these routes is selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Cassia RMP management direction for Management Area 11 (which encompasses the Cotterel Mountain range), includes the following:

“Limit rights-of-way (ROWs) to existing facilities/localities;”

The Cassia RMP management direction for Management Areas 3, 4, and 12 includes the following management objectives:

“Preserve scenic values in the Goose Creek Travel Zone (within one-half mile of the Goose Creek Road between Wilson Pass and the Utah border).”

The RMP states that the “consideration of scenic values will be included in the analysis of all activities involving alteration of the natural character of the landscape. The degree of alteration allowed is determined through an inventory process which results in the classification of all public lands into one of five Visual Resource Management classes, each class allowing for a different degree of modification.” The Project is inconsistent with VRM objectives in four areas depending on the route selected. Alternative 7H crosses VRM Class II and III areas, an isolated parcel managed as VRM Class II is crossed by the Alternative 7E, and VRM Class II and III areas within the Goose Creek Travel Zone are crossed by Alternatives 7I and 7J.

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to 1) modify the ROW restriction in Management Area 11, 2) modify limitations for the Goose Creek scenic area, and 3) change the visual resource classification for areas associated with the transmission line. These modifications would allow the Project to be consistent with the Cassia RMP.

3.6.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Proposed Route includes one 118.1-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the Populus Substation and the proposed Cedar Hill Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho. The transmission line would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross several parcels of BLM-managed land covered by the

Cassia RMP. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figure A-9 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 7.

No east/west utility corridors cross the Cassia Planning Area. The Proposed Route crosses the eastern boundary of the Planning Area in Section 12, T.10 S., R. 29 E. and follows a generally westward route to the Cedar Hill Substation near the northwest corner of the Planning Area. Alternative 7H crosses the eastern boundary of the Cassia Planning Area in Section 26, T.13 S., R. 29 E. and proceeds westward and then turns northwest near the city of Oakley and joining the Proposed Route near MP 112, east of the Cedar Hill Substation. Alternative 7I leaves the 7H route in section 36, T. 13 S., R. 27. E and proceeds southwest and then west until entering Nevada near the southeast corner of the Cassia Division of the Sawtooth NF. Alternative 7E is a 4.5-mile alternative to a portion of Segment 7 of the Proposed Route in the Water Canyon area. Alternatives 7C, 7D, 7F, and 7G are also variations to portions of the Proposed Route.

3.6.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Cassia RMP

The Cassia RMP limits ROWs to existing facilities and locations within Management Area 11. This limitation would be amended to allow development of this Project. The amended RMP decision (changes in italics) for the ROW located within Management Area 11 would read:

“Limit rights-of-way to existing facilities/localities, permit the Gateway West Transmission Line Project.”

Alternative 7I or 7J, if selected, would require a plan amendment that would change the RMP decision in item H of the Resource Management Objectives on page 17 of the Cassia RMP. Alternatives 7I and 7J would cross approximately 348 feet mapped as VRM Class II and approximately 1,241 feet mapped as Class III in the Goose Creek Travel Zone. The transmission line would not in conformance with these VRM classes in these two areas. The proposed amendment (changes in italics) would read:

“The area classified as VRM Class II in the Goose Creek Travel Zone (within one-half mile of the Goose Creek Road between Wilson Pass and the Utah border), will be reclassified as VRM Class III.”

If either Alternative 7E or 7H is selected, plan amendments to the Cassia RMP would be needed. The Cassia RMP protects visual resources. These protections would be rewritten to allow the development of this project. Alternative 7E would cross land mapped as VRM Class II and Alternative 7H would cross land mapped as VRM Class II and III. The amended VRM decision would read (new language in italics):

For Alternative 7E:

“VRM classes are designated as shown in the Cassia RMP; however areas associated with the Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be reclassified as follows: 39 acres in the Spring Canyon area (AOI CA-3 in Appendix G-1) from VRM II to VRM III.”

For Alternative 7H:

“VRM classes are designated as shown in the Cassia RMP; however areas associated with the Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be reclassified as follows: the area north of the ROW (122 acres) in the Jim Sage area (AOI CA-1 in Appendix G-1), and 806 acres Cottonwood Creek area (AOI CA-2 in Appendix G-1) from VRM III to VRM IV.

3.6.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Changing the VRM classes would have direct impacts on the visual resources. In addition, if Alternative 7E, 7H, 7I, or 7J is selected, and the proposed amendments to the RMP are approved, other transmission lines proposed for this general area could choose to follow this same route. These lines could be located adjacent to the Gateway West ROWs without further amendment of the RMP, if approved through the NEPA process. Therefore, cumulative effects of the amendment could include further impacts from additional transmission line construction, including visual impacts as well as impacts to wildlife, soils, cultural and vegetation resources. The amendment allowing a new ROW outside the existing corridors could result in similar cumulative impacts from future development.

The amendment to the Goose Creek travel zone would remove the scenic protection for this area. A transmission line ROW would have a visually altering effect on the scenic and historic experience of viewers. Micrositing could be used to limit this impact and towers would be constructed outside the 660-foot buffer around the historic trail. However, the scenic qualities of mountain ranges and wide expanses would be interrupted by the transmission line, were the amendment approved. This would also be the case for the Jim Sage, Spring Canyon, and Cottonwood Creek areas.

There are 12 known raptor nests within 1 mile of Segment 7 of the Proposed Route (3 burrowing owl and 9 ferruginous hawk). Impacts from the Project could include nest abandonment and loss of young as well as decreased hunting and breeding success. Mitigation measures and appropriate work windows would be implemented to limit these impacts. The Project would result in increased fragmentation of habitat, potentially impacting movement for animals unwilling to cross barriers such as new roads or the presence of overhead structures. Big game habitat would be encountered for the proposed and alternative routes. Approximately 5 miles of mule deer crucial winter range would be crossed by Proposed Route 7 and 4 miles of winter range would be crossed in the Planning Area under Alternative 7H. There are also leks located within 0.6 mile of the identified routes. Impacts from construction and maintenance include direct disturbance, fragmentation, and edge effects, and could result in decreased reproductive success.

The area crossed by the Proposed and Alternative Routes contain steep slopes and some highly erodible soils. Construction activities such as culvert installation for stream crossing, road building, and tower installation have the potential to result in soil loss. Mitigation measures and best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts.

3.7 Twin Falls MFP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Burley FO within the Twin Falls MFP Planning Area, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Twin Falls MFP approved in 1982 and the 1989 Salmon Falls Creek ACEC designation amendment, 1989. The MFP does not permit powerlines to the east or west of the two corridors, and the 1989 amendment restricts activities within the designated Salmon Falls Creek ACEC. Segment 9 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 9A, 7I, and 7J do not conform to the Twin Falls MFP.

Proposed Route 9 would cross the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC and eligible WSR. The Twin Falls MFP Amendment (1989) prohibits the crossing of the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC. The Twin Falls MFP Amendment (1989) for the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC emphasizes the following:

“No development in the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC.”

This portion of Salmon Falls Creek is also an eligible WSR (evaluation conducted by the Burley District Office in 1992 and finalized in 2009). An MFP amendment could address issues with the proposed crossing as they relate to Salmon Falls Creek ACEC by either: 1) removing the ACEC designation, or 2) changing the management for ROW avoidance. However, a plan amendment cannot be used to address the issues associated with crossing the eligible WSR segment because an amendment cannot 1) remove the eligibility determination without doing a full suitability study or 2) remove scenery as one of the outstandingly remarkable values (ORVs) of the segment. Therefore, a plan amendment has not been proposed for this crossing.

The segment of Salmon Falls Creek from Salmon Falls Dam to Balanced Rock (see Figure 3.17-12 in Section 3.17 of the Draft EIS) is eligible as a WSR because it is free-flowing and possesses scenic, recreational, and geological ORVs; this segment's tentative classification is Scenic. BLM Manual 8351, *Wild and Scenic Rivers*, states at .32 C:

When a river segment is determined eligible and given a tentative classification (wild, scenic, and/or recreational), its identified ORVs must be afforded adequate protection, subject to valid existing rights, and until the eligibility determination is superseded, management activities and uses shall not be allowed to adversely affect either eligibility or the tentative classification....Each segment shall be managed to protect identified ORVs (subject to valid existing rights) and, to the extent practicable such values shall be enhanced.

This policy is reiterated in Section 0.52 C. of the same manual. An eligibility determination is superseded when the BLM completes a suitability study; if the segment is determined to not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the segment ceases to be eligible and no longer receives protective

management. If the segment is determined to be suitable, the suitability recommendation is forwarded to Congress for further action. Therefore, the BLM concludes that the portion of Segment 9 of the Proposed Route that crosses Salmon Falls Creek could not be approved unless the river is found to be not suitable and no amendment is proposed for crossing the ACEC.

An alternative crossing of the river (Alternative 9C) avoids the eligible WSR and the ACEC, making the remaining portions of the Proposed Route feasible; however, portions of the remaining route would not conform to visual resource direction in the MFP and an amendment would be required.

The Twin Falls MFP emphasizes the following Visual Resources requirements:

“VRM 1.1 Manage Salmon Falls Canyon between the Salmon Falls Dam and Lilly Grade for natural ecological change in accordance with a VRM Class I designation. This designation would include only the area from rim to rim. Manage the canyon from Lilly Grade to Balanced Rock under a VRM Class II designation.”

“VRM 1.2 Designate 12,695 acres as VRM Class II. This class requires management activities to be designated and located to blend into the natural landscape and not to be visually apparent to the casual visitor. The following resource management guidelines shall apply:

- 1) Range Management – Juniper and sagebrush removal must be made to simulate adjacent natural openings. Fences, water developments, etc., would require construction with mostly hand tools and be of natural materials. No red fence posts allowed.
- 2) Structures – Structures must incorporate the natural lines, colors, and materials of the natural landscape, skylined structures would be prohibited.
- 3) Roads – Required roads must be concealed by vegetation, follow natural landforms, and be seeded as soon as possible. Overland “roads” may be necessary in some areas to protect the scenic values. Cut and fill areas that exceed 5 feet will generally not be accepted unless the fill can be replaced and vegetation established in 2 years.”

An amendment to the VRM decisions permitting a one-time allowance without reclassifying the VRM class would be needed if Segment 9 of the Proposed Route is selected *and* an “unsuitable” determination was reached for WSR designation. Additionally, an amendment to the ACEC restrictions permitting the crossing of the ACEC would be needed.

3.7.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Twin Falls MFP

The Project’s Proposed Route 9 and Route Alternatives 9A, 9B, 7I, and 7J would cross through areas managed by the Twin Falls MFP. The route locations were selected to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, TES species, sensitive lands, cultural resources, and visual resources.

The Project would not conform to the Twin Falls MFP and land use plan amendments would be needed if the Segment 9 Proposed Route or Alternative 9A, 7I, or 7J is selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Twin Falls MFP L-4 decision for Lands emphasizes the following:

“L-4.1 Allow future major power transmission lines (line of at least 46-138RV which originate and terminate outside of the MFP area) to be constructed within the recommended corridors. Also allow construction of transmission lines between the corridors. Do not permit power lines to the west or the east of the two corridors. Exempt service lines from restriction.”

The Twin Falls MFP direction for Visual Resources emphasizes the following:

“VRM-1.2 Designate 12,695 acres as VRM Class II. This Class requires management activities to be designated and located to blend into the natural landscape and not to be visually apparent to the casual visitor,”

“VRM-1.3 Designate 32,819 acres as VRM Class III. (see overlay D.5). This class provides the management activities may be evident to the casual visitor; however, the activity should remain subordinate to the visual strength and natural character of the landscape.”

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to modify the ROW and visual resource management designations such that the Project would be consistent with the Twin Falls MFP.

3.7.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Segment 9 Proposed Route and Alternatives 9A, 9B, 9C, 7I, and 7J cross through the areas managed under the Twin Falls MFP. Segment 10 of the Proposed Route also crosses through areas managed under the Twin Falls MFP, although this route is not on BLM-managed land. The Segment 9 Proposed Route includes one 161.7-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Cedar Hill Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties and the Hemingway Substation in Idaho. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the Malad Hills MFP. Alternative 7I to the Segment 7 Proposed Route includes one 173.4-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the Populus Substation and the Cedar Hills Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho. Alternative 7J, a variant of 7I, follows the same route through the Twin Falls MFP area. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figures A-9 and A-11 of the Draft EIS show the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segments 7 and 9, respectively.

The Segment 9 Proposed Route enters lands managed by the Twin Falls MFP west of Cedar Hill. The route proceeds in a westerly direction and then turns north, paralleling Salmon Falls Creek, which the route crosses as it leaves the Twin Falls Planning Area. Alternative 9A is a 7.7-mile-long route that is located 2 miles south of Hub Butte. It was

the Proposed Route but was changed to a feasible alternative route due to concerns regarding agriculture and dairies. Alternative 9B is a 53.2-mile-long route that diverges from the Proposed Route about 5 miles south of Castleford and rejoins west of the Twin Falls Planning Area. This alternative parallels the route and was identified based on the presence of a nearby WWE corridor and existing utility corridors. The Segment 9 Proposed Route crosses the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC. Alternative 9C leaves the Proposed Route at point 9a.5 (on the east side of the river) and rejoins it at point 9c.1 (on the west side of the river). Less than a mile of Alternative 9C is within the Twin Falls MFP area. Alternative 9C avoids crossing the eligible WSR and the ACEC.

Alternative 7I enters the Twin Falls Planning Area in its southeast corner and then turns in a northerly direction to the Cedar Hill Substation, following the WWE corridor for all but 2.5 miles of its route within the Planning Area. This alternative was designed as a result of landowner opposition to the Segment 7 Proposed Route. Alternative 7I maximizes the use of public land. Alternative 7J follows the same alignment as 7I until approximately 7.5 miles after it moves north of the state line, at which point 7J follows a northwesterly route for approximately 16.6 miles across mostly non-BLM-managed land. For this alternative, it is proposed to locate the Cedar Hill Substation at this point, from which Alternative 7J spits into two routes; one takes a northeastern route to join up where the current proposed location of the Cedar Hill Substation, while the other continues to the northwest within the WWE corridor to join up with Segment 9.

3.7.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Twin Falls MFP

The Segment 9 Proposed Route and Route Alternatives would require a plan amendment to the Twin Falls MFP for granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Burley FO. The Twin Falls MFP allows new utilities to be constructed in existing corridors and protects visual resources. These MFP decisions would be rewritten to allow development of this Project.

The Proposed Route (Segment 9) and Alternatives 9A, 7I, and 7J would require a plan amendment to the Twin Falls MFP. “Land 4.1” would be rewritten to allow the development of this Project. The amended MFP decision (changes in italics) would read:

“Allow future major power transmission lines (line of at least 46-138RV which originate and terminate outside of the MFP area) to be constructed within the recommended corridors. Also allow construction of transmission lines between the corridors. Do not permit power lines to the west or the east of the two corridors. *Permit the Gateway West Transmission Line Project as a one-time allowance.* Exempt service lines from restriction.”

Alternatives 7I and 7J would require an amendment to the Rock Creek Area VRM Classification. Seventy acres of VRM II (the VRM II class area north of the section line) would be changed to VRM Class III. This would require an amendment to the MFP for VRM-1.2 and VRM-1.3; amending the number of acres of VRM II and VRM III.

“VRM-1.2 Designate *12,625* acres as VRM Class II. This Class requires management activities to be designated and located to blend into the natural landscape and not to be visually apparent to the casual visitor,”

“VRM-1.3 Designate 32,889 acres as VRM Class III. (see overlay D.5 and include 70 acres of previously VRM II land in the Rock Creek Area, north of the section line). This class provides the management activities may be evident to the casual visitor; however, the activity should remain subordinate to the visual strength and natural character of the landscape.”

3.7.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.2.2 and 3.17.2.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Allowing the transmission line to cross outside of the designated corridors will extend the impacts of transmission lines in an east-west direction. The rationale for the existing decision is that “utility corridors serve to accommodate major power lines in a designated route which minimizes environmental construction and provides a feasible, economical route for power transmission.” There is concern about major transmission lines causing serious adverse environmental impacts in the Foothills area, the Shoshone Basin, and along Salmon Falls Creek.

Alternatives 7I and 7J would be within the WWE corridor for most of their length within the Planning Area, while Proposed Route 9 and Alternative 9A cross the Planning Area in an east-west direction. The east-west route crosses mule deer range and near raptor nests. The transmission line construction and operation would impact vegetation and soils as well as wildlife. Impacts include soil compaction and erosion, potential weed spread and introduction, removal of native vegetation, disturbance to wildlife due to habitat fragmentation, behavioral avoidance of structures and roads, and dust and noise disturbance disrupting breeding and rearing.

In areas where the VRM class is changed from II to III, an amendment would result in the area being managed at a lower protection level. Amending the RMP to lower the VRM classification may encourage additional development in these areas.

No amendment is proposed for crossing the ACEC; therefore, an alternative that crosses the ACEC could not be selected and implemented. Resources in the ACEC would not be affected by the Project.

3.8 Jarbidge RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Jarbidge FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Jarbidge RMP approved on March 23, 1987, and the Jarbidge RMP Amendment approved in 1989. The RMP designates utility avoidance/restricted areas for cultural features, designates VRM Class I and II areas, and establishes an ACEC along Salmon Falls Creek. The proposed Project would not conform to these requirements in the Jarbidge RMP.

The 1989 Amendment to the Jarbidge RMP designated the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC. Management requirements within this Amendment state:

“No development in the Salmon Falls Creek ACEC.”

This portion of Salmon Falls Creek is also an eligible WSR. An RMP amendment could address issues with the proposed crossing as they relate to Salmon Falls Creek ACEC by either: 1) removing the ACEC designation, or 2) changing the management for ROW avoidance. However, a plan amendment cannot be used in a similar way to address the issues associated with crossing the eligible WSR segment because an amendment cannot 1) remove the eligibility determination without doing a full suitability study or 2) remove scenery as one of the ORVs of the segment. Therefore, a plan amendment has not been proposed for this crossing.

The segment of Salmon Falls Creek from Salmon Falls Dam to Balanced Rock (see Figure 3.17-12) is eligible as a WSR because it is free-flowing and possesses scenic, recreational, and geological ORVs; this segment’s tentative classification is Scenic. BLM Manual 8351, *Wild and Scenic Rivers*, states at .32 C:

“When a river segment is determined eligible and given a tentative classification (wild, scenic, and/or recreational), its identified ORVs must be afforded adequate protection, subject to valid existing rights, and until the eligibility determination is superseded, management activities and uses shall not be allowed to adversely affect either eligibility or the tentative classification....Each segment shall be managed to protect identified ORVs (subject to valid existing rights) and, to the extent practicable such values shall be enhanced.”

This policy is reiterated in Section 0.52 C. of the same manual. An eligibility determination is superseded when the BLM completes a suitability study; if the segment is determined to not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, the segment ceases to be eligible and no longer receives protective management. If the segment is determined to be suitable, the suitability recommendation is forwarded to Congress for further action. Therefore, the BLM concludes that the portion of Segment 9 of the Proposed Route that crosses Salmon Falls Creek could not be approved unless the river is found to be not suitable and no amendment is proposed for crossing the ACEC.

An alternative crossing of the river (Alternative 9C) avoids the eligible WSR and the ACEC; therefore, the remaining portions of the Proposed Route are feasible. However, portions of the remaining route would not conform to other direction in the RMP and an amendment would be required.

3.8.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Jarbidge RMP

The Project’s Proposed Route and Route Alternatives would cross through the Jarbidge Management Area. Approximately 67 miles (63 miles on BLM-managed land) of Segment 9 would be within in the Planning Area. Approximately 6 miles of Alternative 9C (3.6 on BLM-managed land), and 43 miles of 9B (23.5 on BLM-managed land) would be within the Jarbidge RMP Planning Area. Segment 8 and Alternative 8A are within the Planning Area for approximately 12 miles (6.4 on BLM-managed land) and 29 miles (16.7 miles on BLM-managed land), respectively. The Jarbidge RMP includes

management objectives for many resources including lands, minerals, range management, watershed, wildlife, visual, cultural, recreation, and transportation support. The RMP decisions that are proposed to be amended relate to cultural and visual resources. The route locations for the Project were developed to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible.

The Project is in conformance with the direction provided in the Jarbidge RMP; thus, amendments to the land use plan would be needed for Segment 9 Proposed Route or Alternatives 8A, 9B, or 9D, if any are selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Jarbidge RMP MUA-7 Saylor Creek East (affected by Alternative 8A) Management Objectives include managing “the Oregon Trail to preserve remaining ruts and trail features and nominate to national register.” Additionally, there is an objective to “Protect the 96 paleontologic sites in Pasadena Valley, Rosevear Creek and Gulch, Dove Springs, Deer Gulch, Pilgrim spring and Stage, and Glens Ferry.”

These objectives are supported by the following management action:

“MUA-7C) Lands_1. Utility avoidance/restricted area – Oregon Trail 5,888 acres (overhead, surface, underground); Dove Springs (160 acres) and 96 paleontologic sites (surface and underground).” (Jarbidge RMP II-32)

The Jarbidge RMP discusses requirements for areas listed on the NRHP. The following section is a requirement for any activities conducted and/or authorized by the BLM:

“MUA-3 Utility avoidance/restricted area – three Paleontological areas (Sugar Bowl, Glens Ferry, & McGinnis Ranch) and Oregon Trail ruts (7,200 acres/22.5 miles) to overhead and surface disturbance and underground utilities.

“The existing ruts of the main route, north and south alternate routes of the Oregon Trail and Kelton Road will be protected by not allowing incompatible uses to occur within ½ mile corridor through which these routes pass.” (Jarbidge RMP II-90)

The following Route Alternatives would cross an area managed for VRM Class I and II objectives: Proposed Route 9 (Class I and II), Alternative 9D (Class II), Alternative 9B (Class II), and Alternative 8A (Class I).

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to modify several RMP decisions, such that the granting of a ROW for construction of the Project would be in conformance with the Jarbidge RMP.

3.8.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Segments 8 and 9 Proposed Routes and Alternatives 8A, 9B, 9C, and 9E cross through lands managed under the Jarbidge RMP. The Segment 8 Proposed Route includes one 131.0-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Midpoint Substation near the county line between Jerome and Lincoln Counties in Idaho and the proposed Hemingway Substation, located about 30 miles southwest of Boise, Idaho. The Segment 9 Proposed Route includes one 161.7-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Cedar Hill Substation

near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho and the Hemingway Substation. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the Jarbidge RMP. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and the Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figures A-10 and A-11 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segments 8 and 9.

Segment 8 of the Proposed Route enters the Jarbidge Planning Area west of King Hill and continues in a westerly direction where it leaves the Jarbidge Planning Area east of the Hot Springs Reservoir. Alternative 8A enters the Jarbidge Planning Area near Hagerman and intersects the Proposed Route within lands managed by the Jarbidge RMP. Alternative 8A is within or parallel to a WWE corridor.

The Segment 9 Proposed Route enters the Jarbidge Management Area at Salmon Falls Creek in an ACEC at Lily Grade. The Proposed Route follows a northwesterly direction and leaves the Jarbidge Planning Area at Indian Cove. Alternative 9C, a 15.3-mile-long segment, was the Proposed Route but was changed to an alternative due to agricultural concerns. Alternative 9B is a 53.2-mile-long segment, located between Castleford and the Owyhee/Elmore County Line. The route using Alternative 9B is several miles longer than the Proposed Route; however, it follows an adjacent WWE corridor. Alternative 9C, a 15.3-mile-long segment, leaves the Proposed Route at point 9a.5 (on the east side of the river within the Twin Falls MFP area) and rejoins it at point 9c.1 (on the west side of the river). Nearly all of 9C is within the Jarbidge RMP area. Alternative 9C avoids crossing the eligible WSR and the ACEC.

3.8.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Jarbidge RMP

Alternative 8A, if selected, would require a plan amendment to allow the granting of a ROW across lands managed under the Jarbidge RMP. The Jarbidge RMP includes measures to protect cultural sites. This protection would be rewritten to allow development of this Project, with mitigation measures that would be implemented to maintain the integrity of the trail ruts. The amendment changing areas from restricted to avoidance would allow the transmission line, providing there are no other viable alternatives outside the restricted areas. The amended decision for the Jarbidge RMP MUA-7 Saylor Creek East (changes in italics) would read:

“1. Utility avoidance/restricted area – *no surface disturbance within 330 feet of the Oregon Trail, Dove Springs (160 acres), and 96 paleontologic sites (surface and underground)..*”

For Jarbidge RMP MUA-3 Lower Bennett, the amended decision for Proposed Segment 8 and Alternative 8A would read (changes in italics):

“Utility avoidance/restricted area – three paleontological areas (Sugar Bowl, Glens Ferry, & McGinnis Ranch) & Oregon Trail ruts (7,200 acres/22.5 miles) to overhead and surface disturbance and underground utilities. *The current lands decision is amended in the area identified as restricted in T 04 S R 09 E Section 35 and T 05 S R 09 E Section 2Section 35 to reclassify these areas as avoidance to accommodate a 500kV powerline right of way.*”

Segments 8 and 9 of the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives 8A, 9B, 9D, and 9G would require a plan amendment to the Jarbidge RMP if any were selected.

Segment 9 crosses 1.7 miles of VRM Class II within the WWE Corridor. Alternative 9B would cross 1.6 miles of VRM Class I within the WWE corridor. Alternative 9D/9G crosses 0.15 miles VRM Class II following an existing transmission line route. The Jarbidge RMP protects visual resources; these RMP decisions would be rewritten to allow the development of this Project.

The amended VRM decision would read (new language in italics):

“The degree of alterations to the natural landscape will be guided by the criteria established for the four Visual Resource Management Classes as outlined in BLM 8400” *however the area within the WWE Corridor will be reclassified as VRM III (affects AOs, J-2, BOP-1/J-3, J-4, and J-5).*”

Proposed Route 8 would cross VRM Class I land associated with the Oregon NHT. As a powerline would not be consistent with the VRM I objectives, the new VRM decision would read (new language in italics):

“The visual or scenic values of the public lands will be considered whenever any physical actions are proposed on BLM lands. The Degree of alterations to the natural landscape will be guided by the criteria established for the four Visual Resource Management Classes as outlined in BLM 8400. VRM Classes will be managed as shown on Map 9. *The VRM decision and Map 9 are amended to accommodate a major powerline R/W. Approximately 5,200 acres of VRM Class I area associated with the Oregon Trail is Re-classified to VRM Class III.*”

Alternative Route 8A would cross VRM Class I land associated with the Oregon NHT. As a powerline would not be consistent with the VRM I objectives, the new VRM decision would read (new language in italics):

“The visual or scenic values of the public lands will be considered whenever any physical actions are proposed on BLM lands. The Degree of alterations to the natural landscape will be guided by the criteria established for the four Visual Resource Management Classes as outlined in BLM 8400. VRM Classes will be managed as shown on Map 9. *The VRM decision and Map 9 are amended to accommodate a major powerline R/W. Approximately 2,800 acres of VRM Class I area associated with the Oregon Trail is Re-classified to VRM Class III.*”

Segment 8 of the Proposed Routed would require a plan amendment to the Jarbidge RMP if it was selected. The amended text would read (changes in italics):

“The existing ruts of the main route, north and south alternate routes of the Oregon Trail and Kelton Road will be protected by not allowing incompatible uses to occur within 0.5 mile corridor through which these routes pass, *except where within the WWE, where no surface disturbance will be allowed within 330 feet of the trail.*”

An area north of the Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument that would be crossed by the Project was incorrectly mapped as VRM Class II in the RMP. It is actually VRM Class III.

3.8.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Section 3.11.2.2 for effects on special status species; and Section 3.17.2.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Reclassifying the area within the WWE corridor to VRM Class III would allow development within this corridor to conform to the RMP. VRM Class I lands within the WWE corridor crossed by Segments 8 and 9 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 8A, 9B, and 9D/9G would affect Oregon Trail users. Building a transmission line across the trail would detract from the historical sense-of-place. Reclassifying the area around Saylor Creek, currently designated as VRM Class II, would allow the transmission line to span the canyon. The transmission line would be highly visible to sensitive viewers and draw the attention of the casual observer from over a mile away. This change in setting would adversely affect the recreational experience.

Alternative 8A crosses the Oregon NHT and Kelton Road within the WWE corridor. The proposed amendment would reclassify lands within the WWE corridor to VRM Class III while maintaining a 330-foot-wide “no surface disturbance” zone along either side of the trail. This would allow the construction of tower facilities while protecting the integrity of the trail ruts. However, the historic setting for the trail would likely be adversely affected at the transmission line crossing. Mitigation measures would be implemented to reduce these impacts to the extent feasible.

Changing the restricted area designation around important paleontologic sites may impact the fossil resources of the area. While construction disturbance activities could result in the discovery of isolated fossil specimens, the scientific information provided by fossils is maximized by discovery of fossil specimens preserved in place within the host geologic formations, and construction techniques are more likely to damage specimens than discover them. The change in designation could lead to additional development of the corridor, extending the impacts beyond the effects of the Gateway West Project. In areas where the VRM class is changed from Class I or II to Class III, an amendment would result in the area being managed at a lower protection level. Amending the RMP to lower the VRM classification may encourage additional development in these areas.

No amendment is proposed for crossing the ACEC; therefore, an alternative that crosses the ACEC could not be selected and implemented. Resources in the ACEC would not be affected by the Project.

3.9 SRBOP RMP Amendment

The SRBOP RMP, approved in September 2008, guides decisions made by the Four Rivers FO regarding actions that occur in the SRBOP Management Area. These include decisions on the granting of ROWs under Title V of the FLPMA. The RMP restricts major utility development to two existing corridors in the SRBOP Management Area. The RMP also manages motorized vehicle use, protects visual resources, and

prohibits surface disturbing activities near special status species. The Project does not conform to decisions in the SRBOP RMP.

A plan amendment would be needed Segment 8 of the Proposed Route or Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9F, 9G, or 9H are selected. Portions of all these routes are located in an area where motorized vehicle use is restricted to designated routes. A review of RMP objectives and consultation with the Boise District staff indicate that the areas closed to motorized vehicles cannot be amended for Segment 8 (Halverson Bar – 1,150 acres) or Alternative 9D/9F (Cove – 1,600 acres) and still meet the Management Objective to: “Provide motorized vehicle access to the majority of the NCA while reducing the number of unnecessary routes and increasing the non-motorized opportunities.”

Spanning the canyon in these areas would not be feasible, and restrictions on crossing Cove and Halverson Bar cannot be amended to meet RMP objectives; therefore, Segment 8 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 9D and 9G cannot be approved as currently designed (alternatives to these crossings have been developed and are included in the analysis). Amendments are proposed for routes that cross the SRBOP area for visual resources, cultural resources, new corridor restrictions, and SRMAs.

3.9.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the SRBOP RMP

The Proposed Routes along Segments 8 and 9, as well as Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, and 9H cross through the SRBOP Management Area. Approximately 27.5 miles (27 on BLM-managed land) of segment 8 and 13.8 miles (11.8 on BLM-managed land) of segment 9 are within the Planning Area. Approximately 8 miles, 42 miles, and 2.5 miles of Alternatives 8D (8 miles on BLM-managed land), 9D (38.4 miles on BLM-managed land), and 9E (2.5 miles on BLM-managed land), respectively, cross the management area. The route locations were developed to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. These include, but are not limited to, TES species, soil resources, cultural resources, and visual resources.

The Project is not in conformance with the decisions in the SRBOP RMP and the plan would need to be amended if Segments 8 or 9 of the Proposed Route or Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, or 9H are selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

Portions of Segments 8 and 9 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, or 9H are not within a designated corridor. The SRBOP RMP for Lands, Realty, and Utility Corridors emphasizes the following:

“Restrict major utility developments to the two utility corridors identified.” (Lands Map 3)

The RMP states that “designation of utility corridors and ROW avoidance areas are non-discretionary actions” (2.11 Lands and Realty 2-14). It goes on to state that “Land containing significant cultural resources will be protected during any use-authorized project installation or during use” (2.17 Utility and Communication Corridors 2-25). The SRBOP RMP emphasizes protection of cultural restrictions and protection of key areas through ROW avoidance areas:

“Retain all public lands in the 43,000-acre ROW avoidance area to protect the visual corridor along the historic Oregon Trail and the resources along the Snake River canyon.” (Lands Map 1)

The SRBOP RMP for the Visual Resources has the objective of protecting “the visual resources of historic areas with a secondary emphasis on the Snake River Canyon, with the following management action:

“Manage the areas along the Oregon Trail and the Snake River Canyon as VRM Class II, the OTA as Class IV and remaining areas as Class III. [Visual Resource Management (VRM) Map] This will provide reasonable protection of the Oregon Trail and flexibility in managing the remainder of the NCA.”

“VRM Class II management areas will not be available for utility corridors.”

The Segment 8 Proposed Route and Alternatives 8E, 9D, 9F, 9G, and 9H would impact VRM Class II lands associated with the Oregon NHT and Snake River Canyon. The SRBOP Visual Resources management guidelines state (SRBOP RMP, 2.8 Visual Resources 2-13):

“Manage the areas along the Oregon Trail and the Snake River Canyon as VRM Class II, the OTA as Class IV and remaining areas as Class III. [Visual Resource Management (VRM Map A-147)].”

Segment 8 of the Proposed Route would pass through the Snake River SRMA. This use is not in conformance with the SRMA designation based on “recreational, scenic or cultural values.”

“This SRMA consists of 22,300 acres in the Snake River Canyon downstream from Grandview, Idaho that is managed for the protection of cultural and scenic values.” (2.14 Recreation 2-20).

Alternatives 9D and 9G would pass through Cove, a non-motorized area within the C.J. Strike SRMA. This use is not in conformance with the SRMA designation based on “recreational, scenic or cultural values.” (Note: The following amendment is presented to document the degree of change that would occur if this route were approved; however, the BLM Boise District has stated that they would not approve an amendment for a route through the Cove area.) The designation of the C.J. Strike SRMA is defined as:

“C.J. Strike SRMA: This SRMA consists of 20,000 acres surrounding C.J. Strike Reservoir along the Snake River. The purpose of the SRMA is to provide enhanced recreation management associated with the reservoir, and protection of the Oregon Trail adjacent to the reservoir.” (2.14 Recreation 2-20)

The SRBOP RMP for Utility and Corridors emphasizes the following regarding sensitive plants:

“Include in all BLM authorizations permitting surface disturbing activities (non-grazing), requirements that (1) affected areas be reseeded with a perennial vegetative cover, and (2) surface disturbing activities be located at least a half-mile from occupied sensitive plant habitat.”

Additional amendments for the Project may be required under Slickspot Peppergrass Conservation Agreement (CA), LUP Lands and Realty Management for issuance of rights-of-way.

“Objective: For new rights-of-way and renewal of existing rights-of-way, see Special Status Animal and Plant Species Management program section item (3). Avoid issuing new rights-of-way or renewal of existing rights-of-way in suitable habitat if negative impacts are expected.” (page 21 of the CA; A-83 of the SRPOB RMP)

For slickspot peppergrass, which is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, granting an amendment for the Project may not be in conformance with the following conservation measure in the CA under Conservation Measure 3 – Ensure that new Federal actions support or do not preclude species conservation in slickspot peppergrass habitat (page 4 of the CA; A-67 of the SRPOB RMP):

“b) If direct or indirect negative impacts to the species or its habitat are anticipated as a result of new BLM actions, the activity will be modified to avoid or minimize negative impacts and, where feasible, promote species conservation.”

The purpose of the proposed amendment is to modify the utility corridor, motorized vehicle, visual resource restrictions, and sensitive plant restrictions such that the Project would be in conformance with the SRBOP RMP.

3.9.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Proposed Route along Segments 8 and 9, as well as Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9G, and 9H cross through the SRBOP Management Area. The Proposed Route along Segment 8 includes one 131-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Midpoint Substation near the county line between Jerome and Lincoln Counties in Idaho and the proposed Hemingway Substation, located about 30 miles southwest of Boise. The Proposed Route along Segment 9 includes one 161.7-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Cedar Hill Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho and the Hemingway Substation. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the SRBOP RMP. Several alternative segments were considered along Segments 8 and 9. The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figures A-10 and A-11 of the Draft EIS show the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segments 8 and 9.

The Proposed Route along Segment 8 crosses into the SRBOP west of the Indian Creek Reservoir and follows a westerly to southwesterly route to the Hemingway Substation. The Proposed Route parallels an existing transmission line through part of the SRBOP but deviates from the existing line near Halverson Bar due to topographic constraints. Alternative 8D (6.4 miles) would bypass the Idaho Army National Guard’s “Alpha” Orchard Training Area. Note that Alternative 8B is located along, but just outside of, the northern edge of the SRBOP. Alternative 8E leaves the Proposed Route approximately 4 miles east of the Snake River crossing at the northwestern section of

the route in order to avoid Cove non-motorized vehicle area. Alternative 8E then follows an existing transmission line south and then turns west to cross the Snake River at the same location as Alternative 9D/9F (therefore, 8E cannot be selected if 9D/9F is also selected).

The Proposed Route for Segment 9 crosses the southeastern end of the SRBOP, as well as a small section between Murphy and Oreana. The majority of the Segment 9 Proposed Route follows the WWE corridor and private lands are also crossed. Alternative 9E, a 68.7-mile segment, generally parallels the Proposed Route and was located to minimize project impacts on private land. A few miles of Alternative 9E are located in the SRBOP. Alternative 9E is outside the WWE corridor, crosses crucial big game management range, and was identified to avoid buffers of sage-grouse leks. Alternative 9D enters the SRBOP southeast of Bruneau and follows a northwesterly route until joining the Segment 9 Proposed Route north of Murphy. This alternative maximizes the use of public land, although it does not follow the WWE corridor. Alternatives 9D and 9G follow existing transmission lines from the C.J. Strike Dam west, on the north side of the river. Alternative 9F follows the Proposed Route until just southwest of C.J. Strike Reservoir. It then turns north and joins Alternative 9D just west of C.J. Strike Reservoir. Alternatives 9G/9H were developed as a southern alternative to the Proposed Route 9 to account for the conflict between 8E and 9D/9F. Alternative 9G follows the same route as 9D until approximately 15 miles east of the west end of the route, where it crosses the Snake River south of 9D and proceeds northwest to join up with the Proposed Route 9 approximately 9 miles from the western end of the Project. Alternative 9H follows the same route as 9F through the C.J. Strike area and then follows the same route as 9H in its western end.

3.9.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the SRBOP RMP

Segments 8 and 9 of the Proposed Routes and Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, and 9H would require a plan amendment to the SRBOP RMP for granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed under the RMP. The SRBOP RMP limits new utilities to existing corridors, establishes area designations for motorized vehicle use, and limits impacts to visual resources and sensitive plant species. These RMP decisions would be rewritten to allow development of this Project.

The Segment 8 and 9 Proposed Routes as well as Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, and 9H would require a plan amendment to the SRBOP RMP to allow a utility corridor outside of the two designated corridors. The RMP management action proposed for amending is located in both the “Land and Realty” and “Utility and Communication Corridors” sections. It is proposed to be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended RMP decision (changes in italics) would read:

“Restrict major utility developments to the two utility corridors identified and the *major powerline R/W*. (Lands Map 3).”

The Segment 8 Proposed Route and Alternatives 8E, 9D, 9F, 9G, and 9H would pass through designated utility corridor and ROW avoidance area designation around the Guffey Butte-Black Butte Archaeological District. This area has a significant concentration of cultural resources and traditional cultural properties and should be avoided unless no other routes are feasible. Implementation of the route would require

an amendment to management actions restricting ROWs in this area (changes in italics):

“Objective: ROW authorizations for utility developments will be compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established, emphasizing habitat protection with economic development:

“Retain all public lands in the 43,000-acre ROW avoidance area to protect the visual corridor along the historic Oregon Trail and the resources along the Snake River canyon. *Permit the Gateway West Transmission Line Project as a one-time allowance with significant mitigation required to maintain the cultural resources and traditional cultural properties of the area.*”

Authorization of this amendment would have significant mitigation measures and specific route determination would be required to avoid areas of cultural resources and traditional properties.

A plan amendment would also be needed for VRM management objectives for the Segment 8 Proposed Route and Alternatives 9D, 9F, 9G, and 9H. The proposed amendment would involve changing the “Standard Operating Procedures” language in the “Utility and Communication Corridors” section to read (changes in italics):

“VRM Class II management areas will not be available for utility corridors, *except allow the development of the Gateway West Transmission Line Project.*”

A proposed amendment for visual resources would also involve changing the management action in the “Visual Resources” section to read (changes in italics):

For Proposed Route 8:

“Manage the areas along the Oregon Trail and the Snake River Canyon as VRM Class II, the OTA as Class IV and remaining areas as Class III. *Approximately 6,400 acres of Class II areas associated with the Oregon Trail and scenic values associated with the Oregon Trail and scenic values associated with the Snake River Canyon would be designated as Class III to accommodate a major powerline R/W.*”

For Alternatives 8E, 9D, and 9F:

“Manage the areas along the Oregon Trail and the Snake River Canyon as VRM Class II, the OTA as Class IV and remaining areas as Class III. *Approximately 3,100 acres of Class II areas associated with the Oregon Trail and scenic values associated with the Snake River Canyon is designated as Class III to accommodate a major powerline R/W.*”

For Alternative 9G/9H:

“*VRM Class II areas within 250 of the Route centerline would be reclassified to VRM Class III, taking into account the need for a 0.5 mile buffer from NHTs. Mitigation will include adjusting the alignment to ensure a 0.5 mile buffer from NHTs is maintained.*”

Segment 8 of the Proposed Route would pass through the Snake River SRMA. This use is not in conformance with the SRMA designation based on “recreational, scenic or

cultural values.” The following amendment reducing the designated area is proposed for the Project to be in conformance with the RMP (changes in italics):

“This SRMA consists of *15,900* acres in the Snake River Canyon downstream from Grandview, Idaho that is managed for the protection of cultural and scenic values. *The SRMA designation has been reduced by approximately 6,400 acres to accommodate a major powerline.*”

Alternatives 9D and 9G would pass through Cove, a non-motorized area within the C.J. Strike SRMA. This use is not in conformance with the SRMA designation based on “recreational, scenic or cultural values.” The following amendment reducing the designated area would be required for the Project to be in conformance with the RMP (changes in italics):

“C.J. Strike SRMA: This SRMA consists of *16, 900* acres surrounding C.J. Strike Reservoir along the Snake River. The purpose of the SRMA is to provide enhanced recreation management associated with the reservoir, and protection of the Oregon Trail adjacent to the reservoir. *The SRMA designation has been reduced by approximately 3,100 acres to accommodate a major powerline R/W.*”

(Note: This amendment is presented to document the degree of change that would occur if this route were approved; however, the BLM Boise District has stated that they would not approve an amendment for a route through the Cove area.)

The Segments 8 and 9 Proposed Routes and Alternatives 8D, 8E, 9D, 9E, 9F, 9G, and 9H would require a plan amendment to the SRBOP RMP to allow for the construction of the Project near sensitive plants. The proposed amendment would involve changing the management decision in the “Utility and Communication Corridors” as well as the “Lands and Realty” sections to read (changes in italics):

“Objective: ROW authorizations for utility developments will be compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established, emphasizing habitat protection with economic development.” [2-25 and 2-16 of the SNBOP RMP]

“Include in all BLM authorizations permitting surface disturbing activities (non-grazing), requirements that (1) affected areas be reseeded with a perennial vegetative cover, and (2) surface disturbing activities be located at least a half-mile from occupied sensitive plant habitat, *except allow the development of the Gateway West Transmission Line Project with mitigation to protect sensitive plants, including slickspot peppergrass; where no construction, including roads, will occur within 50 feet of known or surveyed slickspot peppergrass habitat. Surveys will be conducted. Full field clearances shall be conducted that meet USFWS protocols prior to construction. Remediation will use weed-free seed mix and non-till methods in sensitive habitat and no soil placement over slickspot peppergrass.*”

“Require all permit holders in slickspot peppergrass habitat to conform to applicable conservation measures from the CA (Appendix 8). *The Gateway West Transmission Line will be allowed to remove limited amounts of sagebrush for construction while maintaining a distance of at least 50 feet from existing or*

known peppergrass occurrences. These activities will be monitored and mitigated for.”

Additional amendments for the Project may be required under Slickspot Peppergrass CA, LUP Lands and Realty Management for issuance of rights-of-way:

“Objective: For new rights-of-way and renewal of existing rights-of-way, see Special Status Animal and Plant Species Management program section item (3). Avoid issuing new rights-of-way or renewal of existing rights-of-way in suitable habitat if negative impacts are expected.” (page 21 of the CA; A-83 of the SRPOB RMP)

For slickspot peppergrass, which is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act, granting an amendment for the Project may not be in conformance with the following conservation measure in the CA under Conservation Measure 3 – Ensure that new Federal actions support or do not preclude species conservation in slickspot peppergrass habitat (page 4 of the CA; A-67 of the SRPOB RMP):

“b) If direct or indirect negative impacts to the species or its habitat are anticipated as a result of new BLM actions, the activity will be modified to avoid or minimize negative impacts and, where feasible, promote species conservation.”

3.9.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Section 3.11.2.2 for effects on special status species; Section 3.15.2.3 for effects on soils; and Section 3.17.2.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Amendments to sensitive species and avoidance area requirements would adversely impact the ability to meet the RMP Objectives. The RMP discussion of the operational procedures for Utility and Communication corridors specifically identifies requirements for protection of land containing significant cultural resources as well as consideration of tribal interests. In addition, there are multiple procedures for protecting sensitive species and habitat. The proposed changes could reduce the ability of the agency to manage the land to meet the stated objective of authorizing ROWs to be compatible with the purposes for which the NCA was established, i.e., emphasizing habitat protection and economic development. “Significant mitigation” could be required if these amendments are accepted and would likely involve modifications or stipulations to the ROW grant.

Changing the VRM Class II and SRMA designations would affect the ability to meet the plan objectives. The Visual Resource objective is to protect visual resources of historic areas. Changing the VRM class would reduce the level of protection for some historic areas. The construction of the transmission line, if approved, would adversely affect the historic character of place where it is installed because it would dominate the landscape.

Recreation objective goals for the Oregon NHT and the C.J. Strike SRMAs would not be directly impacted because the affected areas have been removed from designation; however, reduction in lands available for recreation to affect the overall goals for recreation management.

Allowing construction in the Utility Avoidance Area and in areas of high cultural importance such as the Guffey Butte-Black Butte Archaeological District could impact the ability to meet management objectives of protecting these areas and maintaining the cultural landscape. Potential impacts could include loss of historic artifacts, loss of historic character of the landscape, and diminished traditional cultural properties and resources. "Significant mitigation" would be required to limit these impacts as described in the SRBOP ROD 2-1; which could involve extensive cultural surveys, micro-siting, data recovery, and on-site mitigation.

Construction within slickspot peppergrass areas, even with mitigation, could impact the recovery and species conservation efforts. Micro-siting and thorough surveys would be required to avoid damage to populations near the construction and operations areas.

Routes that are located in canyon areas are likely to have impacts on raptors. Because this NCA was designated, in large part, to protect raptor species, such impacts could affect the ability of the SRBOP to meet their management goals. The towers and conductors would be constructed following Avian Power Line Interaction Committee recommendations in avian habitat. Mitigation measures such as using anti-collision devices, avoiding guyed towers where possible, and installing anti-collision devices where required could further lower the impacts to raptor species.

3.10 Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP Amendment

The Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP (1980) provides direction for management of public land under the jurisdiction of the Shoshone FO in south-central Idaho. The Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP Planning Area consists of approximately 892,000 acres in Blaine, Camas, Elmore, Gooding, and Lincoln Counties and guides actions such as the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA. The MFP includes management objectives and recommendations for scenic and cultural resources. The proposed crossing of the Oregon NHT would impact visual resources and archeological resources; thus, the proposed Project is not in conformance with the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP.

3.10.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP

Approximately 21 miles of the Project's Proposed Route in Segment 8 would cross through the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills Planning Area, 12.5 miles through areas covered by the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP. This route would cross 8.2 miles of VRM Class II lands as well as crossing the Oregon NHT. The location of the Proposed Route was identified to comply with WECC requirements and to protect important resources to the greatest extent feasible. These resources include, but are not limited to, threatened and endangered plants, wildlife, sensitive lands, and archeological and visual resources.

Because the Project does not conform to the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP, land use plan amendments would be needed if the Segment 8 Proposed Route is selected.

Along the length of Segment 8, five alternative routes were considered in detail (and four additional alternatives were considered but were eliminated from detailed study). Alternative 8A is the only alternative for this portion of Segment 8 and is not within the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP Planning Area; thus, if Alternative 8A were selected, an amendment of the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP would not be required. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide for a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

The Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP management objective REC 4.1 for visual resources is to “manage the visual resources within the Planning Area in conformance with the guidance in BLM Manual 6310.18B-E.” The recommendation for achieving this follows:

“No management activity should be allowed to cause any evident changes in the form, line color or texture that is characteristic of the landscape within this Class II area.”

The decision for meeting the objective is to use the above recommendation as “guidance for the Class II areas, utilizing concealment, repetition of elements, minimizing surface disturbance, etc., to meet the goal” (Bennett Hills-Timmerman Hills MFP; Recreation 4.1).

The Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP Management Objective for cultural resources is to “identify, evaluate, and manage cultural resources in the Bennett Hills-Timmerman Hills Planning Units” (Bennett Hills-Timmerman Hills MFP; Recreation R-14). The management recommendation, REC 14.6, for Class I archaeological resources, emphasizes the following:

“Prohibit all land disturbing developments and uses on archeological sites.”

The purpose of the proposed amendment is to 1) modify the VRM class designation for areas along existing transmission line ROWs and 2) modify limitations protecting the Oregon NHT. These amendments would allow the Project to conform to the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP if the Segment 8 Proposed Route is selected.

3.10.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

The Segment 8 Proposed Route crosses through the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP. The Proposed Route includes a 131.0-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Midpoint Substation near the county line between Jerome and Lincoln Counties in Idaho and the proposed Hemingway Substation, located about 30 miles southwest of Boise. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and the Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figure A-10 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 8.

Proposed Route 8 enters lands managed by the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP north of Tuttle and east of Bliss, Idaho. The route is located in a northwesterly direction, traveling approximately 21 miles through the southwest corner of the Bennett

Hills/Timmerman Hills management area and parallels an existing 230 kV transmission line. The route is located south of the Pioneer Reservoir, crosses the Gooding County/Elmore County line, and leaves the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills management area east of King Hill. Alternative 8A is located south of the area managed by the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP. Alternative 8A it is within or parallel to a WWE corridor along its entire length.

3.10.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP

The Proposed Route in Segment 8 would require a plan amendment to the Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP, if selected, for granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Shoshone FO. The Bennett Hills/Timmerman Hills MFP protects visual and archeological resources. These protections would be rewritten to allow development of this Project.

The visual resource protection would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended MFP decision (changes in italics) would read:

“No management activity should be allowed to cause any evident changes in the form, line color or texture that is characteristic of the landscape within this Class II area. *The area within 3,000 feet to the north of the existing transmission line ROW will be reclassified from VRM II to VRM III (including the existing ROW).*”

This archaeological resource protection would be rewritten to allow development of this Project and thus crossing of the Oregon NHT by the Project. The amended MFP decision (changes in italics) would read:

“Prohibit all land disturbing developments *within 330 feet of the Oregon Trail and manage archeological sites as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.*”

3.10.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-1 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.2.2 and 3.17.2.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Allowing land-disturbing developments within 330 feet of the Oregon NHT could potentially affect the ability to conform to agency policy of protecting archaeological sites; however, stipulations for managing archeological sites as required by the National Historic Preservation Act should minimize this possibility.

The amendment changing the VRM Class II classification to VRM Class III would change the classification of lands within 3,000 feet of an existing transmission line. This may result in additional utilities being located along this route, which would result in additional impacts to resources managed under the MFP. A new transmission line would impact plants and wildlife as well as scenic and cultural resources. However, the

disturbance would occur in a previously disturbed area. The VRM Class II areas that would be reclassified under this amendment are also big game habitat. Impacts to big game would occur for both the construction and operations phases. Effects of these activities could result in avoidance of preferable forage, increased demand of energy resources in response to disturbance, temporary displacement from preferred habitat, resulting in possible increase in predation, reduced quality of forage, and impacts to reproduction.

The Proposed Route would be within the viewshed of Kings Crown and the surrounding area north of King Hill. Scenery in this area is important to sensitive viewers such as visitors along the Oregon NHT. Existing high-voltage transmission lines and wind towers already interrupt the scenic quality in this area. The Proposed Route would add to this interruption; however, it would avoid disrupting scenic quality in undisturbed areas.

3.11 Wells RMP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Wells FO of the Elko District, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Wells RMP approved in 1985. The RMP currently restricts new utilities to identified corridors. Thus, the proposed Project is not consistent with the Wells RMP as currently written.

3.11.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Existing Wells RMP

The route locations for The Project were selected to comply with WECC requirements and to protect significant resources to the greatest extent feasible. Approximately 8.7 miles of Alternatives 7I and 7J affect areas managed under the Wells RMP. The two alternative routes are co-located in this area.

The Wells RMP includes management objectives for many resources including lands, minerals, range management, wildlife, woodland products, and recreation. The Management Objective for utility corridors is: “To determine designated corridors and identified planning corridors in coordination with other multiple use objectives, including visual quality.”

The Wells RMP in the “Resource Decisions – corridors” (Wells ROD 1985; page 14) section emphasizes the following with regards to utility corridors:

“Locate new facilities in identified planning corridors.”

Alternative 7I/7J does not follow one of the corridors designated by the ROD for the Wells RMP. Therefore, there is a legal requirement to amend the land use plan if Alternative 7I is selected. The Proposed Route 7 and Route Alternatives 7A through 7H are not within the Wells management area and would not require an amendment of the Wells RMP. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide for plan amendments for actions that are not presently in conformance with the plan.

This management action supports the objective “to determine designated corridors and identified planning corridors in coordination with other multiple use objectives, including visual quality.” The purpose of the proposed amendment is to modify the utility corridor

restriction, such that the granting of a ROW for construction of the Project would be in conformance with the Wells RMP.

Additionally, the Wells RMP and supporting documents contain visual resource designation management criteria. The Wells EIS states:

“The Wells RA contains a variety of scenic qualities which have been classified into visual resource management classes following BLM Manual 8400.”

Alternative 7I/7J would cross an isolated parcel of VRM Class II land and thus would not be consistent with the RMP.

3.11.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

Segment 7 of the Proposed Route includes one 118.1-mile single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the Populus Substation and the proposed Cedar Hill Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho. This route would not cross through the area managed under the Wells RMP. Alternative 7I, which crosses the Wells RMP area, also proposes to construct a 500-kV single-circuit line with lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall that would cross several parcels of BLM-managed land covered by the Wells RMP. Several alternative segments were considered. The Proposed Route and Route Alternatives are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figure A-9 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 7.

Alternative 7I is a 173.4-mile route that was developed in response to landowner opposition to the Proposed Route 7. Alternative 7I is substantially longer but maximizes the use of public land and reduces effects on irrigated agricultural lands. Alternative 7I enters Nevada near the southeast corner of the Cassia Division of the Sawtooth NF. The portion of Alternative 7I that is located in Nevada on lands managed under the Wells RMP avoids two Designated Roadless Areas in the adjacent Sawtooth NF. Alternative 7J follows the same route as 7I through the Wells area but diverges from 7I after re-entering Idaho, where it veers northwest to access the Rogerson Substation.

3.11.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Existing Wells RMP

Alternative 7I/7J, if selected, would require a plan amendment to the Wells RMP. This proposed amendment would allow the granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Wells FO in the Elko District. There is a restriction in the Wells RMP that limits new utilities to existing corridors. It is located in the current RMP under “Resource Decisions – Corridors.” This restriction would be rewritten to allow the one time development of the Gateway West Project. The amended restriction (changes in italics) would read:

“Locate new facilities in identified planning corridors; *however, permit a one-time allowance for the Gateway West Transmission Line Project.*”

Alternative 7I/7J crosses a 48.4-acre parcel of land classified as VRM Class II in the Wells RMP Management Area. For the Project to comply with the RMP visual resource management objectives, the following amendment would be needed:

“The Gateway West Transmission Line Project will be allowed as a one-time, visually altering action without reclassifying the area.”

A discussion of the proposed RMP amendment for visual resources is included in Appendix G-1 of the Draft EIS.

3.11.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

The habitat crossed by the 9.4 miles of transmission line within the Wells RMP area is dominated by shrubland. ROW clearing impacts are thus relatively limited compared to forested areas. Impacts of construction and maintenance activities to shrubland habitat would include loss of habitat for tower placement and road construction, as well as disturbance to wildlife during construction. Indirect effects include increase risk of erosion, possible change in soil moisture availability for nearby plants, increase risk of weed introduction which could result in changes in wildlife use and populations. The Wells RMP includes Wildlife Stipulations, including for threatened or endangered species, raptor nesting sites, mule deer crucial winter range, pronghorn antelope crucial winter range, pronghorn antelope kidding areas, greater sage-grouse strutting grounds (leks), greater sage-grouse brood rearing areas, and greater sage-grouse crucial winter habitat. The Gateway West Draft EIS includes mitigation measures that would be required on BLM-managed lands. These include following all RMP requirements, unless an amendment is approved by the responsible official.

Fifteen designated weed species (6 category A, 1 category B, and 8 category C) potentially occur within the project area for the 9.4-mile segment of Alternative 7I crossing the Wells Planning Area. Disturbance from construction has the potential to increase weed distribution, which could potentially degrade surrounding habitats. Mitigation measures would be put into place to minimize this occurrence (see Section 3.8.2.2 and Chapter 2 in the Draft EIS for discussion and list of proposed mitigation measures). Goose Creek milkvetch is known to occur within 5 miles of the project area and thus may be impacted by Project activities. Impacts to this candidate species include direct crushing from Project activities, introduction of exotic species, habitat fragmentation, increased erosion, change in fire regime, and isolation of subpopulations (see Section 3.7.2.2 in the Draft EIS).

Approximately 90 acres of elk summer range and 19 acres of year round range would be affected. Sage-grouse and sharp-tailed grouse would likely be impacted due to direct disturbance to habitat and the presence of towers resulting in possible avoidance areas, as well as possible increase in predation due to the perches provided by towers and lines. The entire 9.4 miles of the proposed transmission line within Nevada crosses an area considered suitable sage-grouse habitat and may contain active leks. Mattoni's blue is known to occur within 5 miles of the project area, at Pilot-Thousand Springs.

Disturbance from project activities could result in temporary loss of larvae; however, slender buckwheat, on which they feed, is not known to occur within 0.5 mile of the project area.

Cultural surveys have not yet been completed. Attempts to inventory the route were discontinued in the fall of 2010 and the spring of 2011 due to snow. Previously recorded cultural inventories resulted in 12 prehistoric sites of Limited Activity being identified within the project Analysis Area. Currently it is estimated that Alternative 7I/7J would have a low impact on cultural resources based on this route containing 65 prehistoric resources largely comprising sites not eligible for the NRHP. However, the Wells FO indicates that the Browns Bench Obsidian Source Area (through which Alternative 7I/7J passes) could contain as many as 200 archaeological sites, many eligible for NRHP in the 9-mile Nevada portion of the route, which would alter the conclusion of low impact to cultural resources for this alternative. Additionally, there is potential impact to an NHT. Impacts may include visual intrusion of the transmission line, affecting the experience of NHT users as well as disruption of historic settings. Additional impacts could be incurred by direct disturbance of cultural sites; however, mitigation measures would be in place to address this issue and re-site towers where deemed necessary (see Section 3.2 of the Draft EIS).

Permitting the Project without changing the VRM class, as proposed, could impact recreational users of the NHT and impact the scenic views of the Goose Creek area. A transmission line following Alternative 7I/7J would be partially screened by the surrounding topography but would introduce new structural elements to this area. As a result, a transmission line in this area would draw the attention of the casual observer and would deviate from the natural form, line, color, and texture. The distance of Alternative 7I/7J from sensitive viewers would not allow project elements to blend in with the surrounding landscape features; therefore, the visual contrast would be high.

The land managed under the Wells RMP includes several designated utility/communications corridors. The effects of an additional transmission line would be similar to the effects of existing transmission lines. Allowing the Project without changing the VRM class would preclude meeting RMP objective of limiting visual impacts on people using the Goose Creek area and portions of the adjacent Sawtooth NF but it would not change the management requirements for the area. Future projects would still need to meet current direction.

3.12 Bruneau MFP Amendment

Actions that occur on lands managed by the Bruneau FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA, are guided by decisions recorded in the Bruneau MFP (1983). The Bruneau MFP currently restricts impacts to visual resources. Thus, the proposed Project does not conform to the Bruneau MFP as currently written.

3.12.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Bruneau MFP

Portions of Segment 9 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 9D/9G, 9E, and 9F/9H would cross through the Bruneau Management Area. The Bruneau MFP includes management objectives for visual resources. A 1,000-foot section of the Proposed Route crosses an area within the WWE corridor that is classified as VRM Class II;

therefore, an amendment to the MFP to allow impacts to visual resources is needed. The route locations for the Project were selected to comply with WECC requirements and to limit impacts to resources to the greatest extent feasible.

As the Project is not in conformance with the current direction provided in the Bruneau MFP for visual resources, there is a legal requirement to amend the land use plan if the Proposed Route for Segment 9 is selected. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide for plan amendments for actions that are not currently in conformance with the plan.

The Bruneau MFP emphasizes the following with regards to visual resources:

- **VISL Objective #1:** Manage all public lands in a manner which will protect and maintain the existing visual qualities, provide for enhancement where consistent with management policies, and provide for rehabilitation of land which presently do not meet the visual quality standards of surrounding lands. Use VRM contrast rating and project application design process for all management activities without unduly reducing commodity production or limiting program effectiveness.
- **VRM-1.2:** Designate 136,000 acres as VRM Class II where activities are designed and located to blend into the natural landscape and not visually apparent to the casual visitor.

The purpose of the proposed amendment is to modify the visual restrictions, such that the granting of a ROW for construction of the Project would be in conformance with the Bruneau MFP.

3.12.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

Segment 9 of the Proposed Route and Alternatives 9D/9G, 9E, and 9F/9H cross through the Bruneau MFP. Proposed Route 9 includes one 161.7-mile single-circuit 500-kV transmission line between the proposed Cedar Hill Substation near the county line between Cassia and Twin Falls Counties in Idaho and the Hemingway Substation. Approximately 33 miles are within the boundaries of the Bruneau FO, 17.8 miles of which cross BLM-managed lands. The transmission lines would be constructed utilizing 500-kV single-circuit lattice steel towers between 145 and 180 feet tall and would cross BLM-managed land covered by the Bruneau MFP. Several alternative segments were considered. The proposed route and the alternative routes are described in Chapter 2 of the Draft EIS, along with the reasons for considering these routes. Appendix A, Figure A-11 of the Draft EIS shows the Proposed Route and Route Alternatives for Segment 9.

Segment 9 of the Proposed Route enters into the Bruneau management area between Bruneau and Hot Spring. The route follows a northwesterly direction and leaves the Bruneau Planning Area at Castle Creek. The majority of the Proposed Route 9 follows the WWE corridor, crossing both public and private lands.

Alternative 9E is a 68.7-mile long segment. Approximately 36.5 miles of this route are within the Bruneau FO boundaries (35.5 of which cross BLM-managed land), between Hot Spring and Castle Creek. Alternative 9E generally parallels the Proposed Route and was located to minimize project impacts on private land. This section is located primarily on BLM-managed land. Alternative 9E is outside the WWE corridor, crosses

crucial big game management range, and is located to avoid buffers of sage-grouse leks.

The majority of Alternatives 9F/9H and 9D/9G are located within the SRBOP, although small sections of these routes (approximately 2.5 miles for Alternative 9F/9H and 0.8 mile of 9D/9G) cross the Bruneau Planning Area. Alternative 9F/9H crosses approximately 1.9 miles of BLM-managed land west of C.J. Strike Reservoir. Alternative 9D/9G crosses approximately 0.4 mile of BLM-managed land north of the town of Bruneau. These alternatives also maximize the use of public land, and although not following the WWE corridor, the portion where Alternatives 9D/9F/9G/9H share the same alignment follows an existing transmission line within the SRBOP.

3.12.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Existing Bruneau MFP

Proposed Route Segment 9, if selected, would require a plan amendment to the Bruneau MFP. This proposed amendment would allow the granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Bruneau FO. There is currently a restriction in the Bruneau MFP that restricts impacts to visual resources. Areas of inconsistency within the WWE corridor will be reclassified to VRM Class III. Segment 9 of the Proposed Route crosses a parcel designated as VRM Class II near Castle Creek. The recently completed Visual Inventory recognizes this parcel as VRM Class III for inventory purposes. With these factors in mind, the visual resource restrictions would be rewritten to reclassify the area.

The amended restriction for visual resource impacts (changes in italics) would read (changes in italics):

- **VISL Objective #1:** Manage all public lands in a manner which will protect and maintain the existing visual qualities, provide for enhancement where consistent with management policies, and provide for rehabilitation of land which presently do not meet the visual quality standards of surrounding lands. Use VRM contrast rating and project application design process for all management activities without unduly reducing commodity production or limiting program effectiveness. *The 282-acre parcel of VRM Class II designated land adjacent to Castle Creek will be reclassified to VRM Class III. This designation is reflective of the presence of the WWE corridor, which comprises 177 acres of the VRM II parcel.*
- **VRM-1.2:** Designate 135,718 acres as VRM Class II where activities are designed and located to blend into the natural landscape and not visually apparent to the casual visitor. *The area designated as VRM Class II adjacent to Castle Creek (AOI B-1) will be reclassified to VRM Class III.*

Alternatively, an amendment reclassifying just the 177-acre area of the parcel within the WWE corridor from VRM Class II to VRM Class III could be approved; however, it would result in the creation of small isolated parcels of VRM Class II areas to either side of the WWE corridor.

3.12.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4

for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

Reclassifying the VRM Class II parcel to VRM Class III would allow the transmission line to conform to the Bruneau MFP. More than half of the area of this parcel is within the WWE corridor. Reclassifying this parcel to VRM Class III would facilitate siting the transmission line in the WWE corridor. Changing the VRM class would also facilitate siting future utility lines within the WWE corridor, which would add to cumulative effects in the area. The direct effects of amending the MFP to allow the Project include the disruption of form, line, texture, and color of the existing landscape. Construction and operations of a high-voltage transmission line would impact wildlife and other resources as described in the Draft EIS.

3.13 Kuna MFP Amendment

The Kuna MFP, approved on March 22, 1983, guides actions that occur with its Planning Area on lands managed by the Four Rivers FO, including the granting of ROW under Title V of the FLPMA. The MFP confines new ROW to existing corridors, and has management requirements for visual and cultural resources. The proposed Project would not be consistent with these requirements and thus is not consistent with the Kuna MFP.

3.13.1 Purpose and Need to Amend the Kuna MFP

Approximately 60 miles (44 miles on BLM-managed land) of Segment 8 of the Proposed Route and 35 miles (17.5 on BLM-managed land) and 8 miles (8 on BLM-managed land) for Alternatives 8B and 8C, respectively, cross through the Kuna Management Area.⁵ The Kuna MFP includes management objectives for many resources including lands, minerals, range management, watershed, wildlife, visual, cultural, recreation, and transportation support. Management Actions being proposed for amendment are those for “Lands,” “Visual,” and “Cultural” resources. The route locations for the Project were developed to comply with WECC requirements and to protect resources to the greatest extent feasible.

Because the Project does not conform to the current direction provided in the Kuna MFP for cultural resources and following existing corridors, the land use plan would need to be amended if the Segment 8 of the Proposed Route or Route Alternatives 8B or 8C is selected. Alternative 8A does not cross the area managed under the Kuna MFP. The planning regulations at 43 CFR 1601 provide a process to consider plan amendments for actions that are not in conformance with the plan.

⁵ Additional alternatives would cross the Kuna MFP Management Area; however, these alternatives are addressed under the SRBOP RMP, which replaces the Kuna MFP in these areas.

The Kuna MFP L-4.1 emphasizes the following with regard to utility ROWs:

“Confine major new utility R/Ws (i.e., 500KV or larger or 24-inch pipeline) to existing corridors, as shown on Overlay L-4. The R/Ws will subject to reasonable stipulations to protect other resource uses.”

An amendment to the Kuna MFP would be needed if Segment 8 of the Proposed Route or Alternative 8B is selected. The Kuna MFP CRM-2.1 states the following with regard to cultural resources:

“CRM-2.1 Manage parcels containing historic site 10-AA-155 and a 1/4-mile-wide corridor on either side of the Union Pacific (Oregon Short Line) Railroad for the protection of cultural resource values. Nominate these sites to the National Register of Historic Places but do not designate them as ACECs. (Other management is listed)”

The purpose of the proposed amendments is to 1) modify the ROW restriction to allow the granting of a ROW for construction of the Project, 2) modify the visual resource designations, and 3) modify cultural resource management requirements such that the Project would be consistent with the Kuna MFP.

3.13.2 Proposed Route and Alternatives

Segment 8 of the Proposed Route would link the Midpoint and Hemingway Substations. This 131.0-mile-long single-circuit 500-kV transmission line would stay north of the Snake River until crossing through the SRBOP parallel to an existing 500-kV transmission line before ending at the Hemingway Substation. Approximately 45 miles of the Segment 8 Proposed Route are within the Kuna MFP boundaries. There are five Route Alternatives in this segment. Alternatives 8B and 8C would cross the Kuna MFP planning area; Alternatives 8D and 8E would cross land managed by the SRBOP RMP.

3.13.3 Proposed Plan Amendment to the Kuna MFP

The Proposed Route for Segment 8 and Route Alternatives 8B and 8C, if selected, would require a plan amendment to the Kuna MFP. This proposed amendment would allow the granting of a ROW for the Project across lands managed by the Four Rivers FO. The Kuna MFP limits new ROW to existing corridors. This limitation would be rewritten to allow development of this Project. The amended decision (changes in italics) would read: “Objective L-4: Establish and protect right-of-way corridors, reserve lands for identified R/W needs, establish or expand communication sites, and clear the records of any unnecessary R/Ws.

“L-4.1 Confine major new utility R/Ws (i.e., 500 KV or larger or 24-inch pipeline) to existing corridors, *and the powerline R/W* as shown on Overlay L-4. The R/Ws will be subject to reasonable stipulations to protect other resource uses.”

There is currently a management objective for managing cultural and historic ruins near the area for the Proposed Segment 8 and Alternatives 8B and 8C. The amended management action (changes in italics) would read: “Objective CRM-2: Protect and preserve historic ruins, structures, and sites for future scientific use and public enjoyment.

“CRM-2.1 Manage parcels containing historic site 10-AA-155 and a 1/4-mile-wide corridor on either side of the Union Pacific (Oregon Short Line) Railroad for the protection of cultural resource values. Nominate these sites to the National Register of Historic Places, but do not designate them as ACECs (Other recommended management is listed). *Allow siting of a transmission line crossing with micrositing required to minimize presence in the restricted area such that the transmission line will not affect the railroad’s status as a Historic Place.*”

3.13.4 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.3.3.3 and 3.3.3.4 for effects on cultural resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation.

The “Lands” amendment would allow the Project to conform to the Management Objective. Allowing additional ROW placement, however, would not establish a new corridor, and new proposals for siting a utility line would require a plan amendment, in addition to assessment under NEPA.

Allowing transmission lines outside the previously designated ROWs would mean that construction and operations impacts would occur outside these corridors. This includes impacts to wildlife, vegetation, soils, and cultural resources.

Segment 8 of the Proposed Route would cross approximately 15 miles of elk crucial winter range, 2.5 miles of which are on BLM-managed land that is not within an existing ROW or the WWE corridor. Approximately 2 miles of the 5 miles of elk crucial winter range crossed by Alternative 8C is on BLM-managed land and is within the WWE corridor.

Approximately 300 raptor nests are located within 1 mile of Segment 8 of the Proposed Route within the Kuna MFP Planning Area (which includes land managed under the SRBOP RMP); 252 of these are on BLM-managed land, and include 36 burrowing owls, 55 ferruginous hawks, and 161 prairie falcons. Alternative 8B would be within 1 mile of 19 nests on BLM-managed land (compared to 241 nests within 1 mile of the comparison portion of the Proposed Route). Alternatives 8C crosses within 1 mile of 5 nests on federal land (compared to 4 nests for the comparison portion of the Proposed Route). Impacts to raptors could include area avoidance, decreased hunting success and nest abandonment due to disturbance. Mitigation measures and BMPs following appropriate working and operations windows would limit these impacts.

Stream crossings would occur for the Proposed Route. Impacts to fish could include increased siltation from culvert installation, decreased riparian cover, and migration barriers. BMPs would be in place to minimize these impacts and correct improperly functioning culverts such that passage is not hindered.

The soils for Segment 8 and its alternatives are generally susceptible to erosion with a low tolerance to soil loss. Impacts from the Project include compaction, as well as soil loss due to wind and water erosion.

Cultural impacts from the amendment to CRM-2.1 could include impacts to the sense of place and historic character of the railroad. Mitigation measures would be aimed at reducing these impacts and construction would occur in a manner that would avoid disturbing important historic resources. Possible impacts include presence of a structure not in keeping with the historic nature of the site, disturbance of land containing culturally important artifacts or landscape features, as well as noise and construction disturbance during construction, decommissioning, and repair and maintenance.

Appendix F-2
Proposed Forest Plan Amendments
Gateway West Transmission Line Project

Prepared by Tetra Tech Inc.

Submitted To:
USDA Forest Service

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|----------------|--|
| AOI | area of inconsistency |
| BLM | Bureau of Land Management |
| CFR | Code of Federal Regulations |
| EIS | Environmental Impact Statement |
| Forest Plan | Land and Resource Management Plan |
| Forest Service | U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service |
| FSH | Forest Service Handbook |
| kV | kilovolt |
| MA | Management Area |
| MP | milepost |
| NEPA | National Environmental Policy Act |
| NF | National Forest |
| NFMA | National Forest Management Act |
| NFS | National Forest System |
| NOI | Notice of Intent |
| PFA | post-fledging area |
| Project | Gateway West Transmission Line Project |
| R | Range |
| ROD | Record of Decision |
| ROS | Recreation Opportunity Spectrum |
| ROW | right-of-way |
| SIO | Scenic Integrity Objective |
| SMS | Scenery Management System |
| SPM | Semi-Primitive Motorized |
| T | Township |
| U.S.C. | United States Code |
| VQO | Visual Quality Objective |
| WWE | West-wide Energy |

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Gateway West Transmission Line Project (Project) starts in Wyoming at the Windstar Substation and takes two paths to the Aeolus Substation—one that swings to the east (Segment 1E) and one (Segment 1W) that for the most part follows or parallels the West-Wide Energy (WWE) corridor and an existing 230-kilovolt (kV) line (proposed for reconstruction as Segment 1W[c]). It then proceeds as a double-circuit 500-kV line from Aeolus to Populus (though in Segments 2 and 3 with one of the circuits initially energized at 230 kV between the Aeolus and Anticline Substations). At Populus, the Project splits into two single-circuit 500-kV roughly parallel paths. Segments 5, 6, and 8 travel on a more northerly route toward the Hemingway Substation through the Borah and Midpoint Substations, while Segments 7 and 9 travel a more southerly route through the Cedar Hill Substation to the Hemingway Substation. Segment 10 provides an interconnection between the Cedar Hill and Midpoint Substations and also provides an interconnection between the more northerly and more southerly routes.

The Project crosses National Forest System (NFS) lands, as well as federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). As a cooperating agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (Forest Service) has and will continue to participate in all aspects of the environmental analysis, and will use the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as a basis for its decision regarding issuance of the special use permit and determining under what terms and conditions the permit should be issued. The applicable Forest Plans establish management direction including Standards and Guidelines for land and resource management on the Forest (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 219). Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), consistency with these Standards and Guidelines must be demonstrated prior to Project approval (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10[e]). The Forest Plan may be amended to permit projects that are inconsistent with Land and Resource Management Plan (hereafter referred to as Forest Plan) direction (36 CFR 219.10[f]). The Forest Service has determined that, depending on the route selected, the proposed Project would have inconsistencies with certain aspects of the Medicine Bow, Caribou, and Sawtooth Forest Plans. Any decisions to amend a plan would be made concurrent with a decision on the proposed Project.

2.0 PLANNING PROCESS

The planning action is to consider amending three Forest Plans as a part of the EIS. Scoping meetings have been held for this Project, where the public, as well as state, local, tribal, and federal governments were invited to participate in the planning process. Public scoping was initiated with the publication of a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS in the Federal Register on May 16, 2008 (73 *Federal Register* 28425). The NOI was followed by a series of nine public meetings held in 2008. Four of these meetings were held in Wyoming, and five were held in Idaho:

- Tuesday, June 3, 2008, in the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, Idaho;
- Tuesday, June 3, 2008, in Murphy, Idaho;

- Wednesday, June 4, 2008, in Pocatello, Idaho;
- Wednesday, June 4, 2008, in Boise, Idaho;
- Thursday, June 5, 2008, in Montpelier, Idaho;
- June 9, 2008, in Casper, Wyoming;
- June 10, 2008, in Rawlins, Wyoming;
- June 11, 2008, in Rock Springs, Wyoming; and
- June 12, 2008, in Kemmerer, Wyoming.

Multiple meetings were also held between 2008 and 2009 with private landowners located within 2 miles of the Project's Proposed and Alternative Routes. The public has been given the opportunity to comment on and provide additional information regarding the Project, including the possibility of Plan amendments, during these meetings. This public input has brought to light additional issues and prompted more comprehensive analysis, which has been included in the EIS.

2.1 PLANNING ISSUES AND CRITERIA

The NOI listed the planning issues that were anticipated and invited the public, other federal agencies, as well as state, local, and Tribal governments to identify additional concerns or issues during scoping meetings and the comment period that followed.

2.1.1 Planning Issues

The issues identified through public scoping and which have been used to develop alternatives are as follows:

- Objection to location on private lands (“If the project is for the general public good, it should be on public lands.”);
- Reliability and proposed separation distances of transmission lines;
- Avoiding sensitive areas such as National Monuments and Wildlife Refuges, military operating areas, National Conservation Areas, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Roadless Areas, and State Parks;
- Effects to Native American traditional cultural properties and respected places;
- Effects to paleontological resources;
- Effects on wildlife habitat, plants, and animals including threatened, endangered, and sensitive species;
- Effects to visual resources and existing view sheds;
- Effects to National Historic Trails and their viewsheds;
- Land use conflicts and consistency with land use plans;
- Effects to soils and water from surface-disturbing activities;
- Effects to agriculture lands;

- Effect on local and regional socioeconomic conditions; and
- Management of invasive plant species and effective reclamation.

2.1.2 Planning Criteria

The following general planning criteria are being considered in the development of the proposed plan amendment:

- National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA);
- Existing laws, regulations, and Forest Service policies;
- Plans, programs and policies of other federal, state and local governments, and Indian Tribes;
- Public input;
- Future needs and demands for existing or potential resource commodities and values;
- Past and present use of public and adjacent lands;
- Environmental impacts;
- Social and economic values;
- Public welfare and safety; and
- President's National Energy Policy.

3.0 PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

Amendments to Forest Plans may be needed to bring the Project into compliance with the applicable Forest Plans for lands crossed by the Project, depending on the final route selected. The final text of the amendment(s) would depend on final conditions of approval for the Project. Inconsistencies of the Project with the applicable Forest Plans include the following:

- Developing a new right-of-way (ROW) outside of approved corridors,
- Building additional roads where motorized access is limited,
- Effects on wildlife habitat,
- Effects on recreation, and
- Effects on scenery/visual resources.

Effects on visual resources were determined through the use of computer modeling, field visits, and site-specific knowledge by Forest staff. The analysis and effects determinations on visual resources are documented in Appendix G-2. The proposed amendments reference the analysis, maps of the locations, referred to as the areas of inconsistency (AOIs), photographs, and simulations included in Appendix G-2.

3.1 MEDICINE BOW FOREST PLAN

Digest: Modifies Management Direction to authorize transmission line construction, operations, and maintenance on Medicine Bow National Forest (NF)¹, Wyoming.

3.1.1 Reason for Amendment

This amendment to the *Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 2003 Revision*² (referred to hereafter as the Medicine Bow Forest Plan) would allow for approval of a construction permit and granting of an authorization for operation and maintenance of high-voltage transmission lines on portions of the Medicine Bow NF, Wyoming. The Project includes rebuilding one line that crosses the Forest as well as the construction of two additional lines. These three lines are generally parallel, and would each cross approximately 2 to 3 miles of the Douglas Ranger District. Also, an alternative to one of the Proposed Route crosses the Forest; therefore, the Forest Service is a cooperating federal agency. A Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) are expected to be published in the spring of 2012.

Three transmission lines would cross the Medicine Bow NF under the Proposed Action. An existing transmission line, referred to as Segment 1W(a), would be rebuilt. Approximately 2.3 miles of this line would be located on NFS land in Management Area (MA) 8.3—Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites. A new transmission line (referred to as Segment 1W[c]) would be built parallel to this existing line, located approximately 1,500 feet to the southeast of 1W(a). Approximately 2.3 miles of 1W(c) would be located on NFS land, all within the WWE corridor. This line would be within an area allocated to MA 8.3—Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites. A second new line, generally 1,500 feet to the southeast of 1W(c) (referred to as Segment 1E, and which would cross 2.8 miles of NFS land) would be built across land allocated to MA 3.31—Back Country Recreation. Approximately 2 miles of Segment 1E would parallel 1W(c). The route would then turn southwest and cross an additional 0.8 mile of NFS land. Alternatively, a line approximately 1,500 feet to the northwest of the existing transmission line may be built instead of the Proposed Route 1E (referred to as Alternative 1E-C, which, if selected, would cross approximately 2 miles of NFS land also allocated to MA 3.31).

3.1.2 Standards to be Amended

This amendment to Forest Plan Direction would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and only to Project decisions on those lands. Lands not analyzed in the EIS must undergo analysis following guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 220 prior to any additional authorizations.

The Medicine Bow Forest Plan contains Standards and Guidelines for activities that can be conducted on NFS lands (Attachment A). Standards are actions that must be followed or are required limits to activities that must be followed to achieve Forest goals. Deviations from Standards must be analyzed and documented in a Forest Plan amendment (Page 1-25). Under the Medicine Bow Forest Plan, Guidelines are

¹ While the Medicine Bow and Routt NFs are managed as one unit, the land and resource management plan discussed in this amendment applies only to the Medicine Bow NF.

² Forest Service. 2003. *Medicine Bow National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 2003 Revision*. Rocky Mountain Region. Laramie, Wyoming. December.

advisable courses of action that should be followed to achieve Forest goals. Deviations from Guidelines must be analyzed during project-level analysis and documented in a project decision document but do not require a Forest Plan amendment (Page 1-25).

Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive Species—Standard 4 (LRMP 1-42) and Standard 5 (LRMP 1-42)

Standard 4: Within each occupied northern goshawk territory, select three nests and protect 30 acres of dense vegetation surrounding each, defining the boundaries of each area based on habitat quality. If fewer than 3 nests are found within an occupied territory, substitute 30-acre areas with characteristics of nesting habitat.

Standard 5: Within each occupied northern goshawk territory, designate a northern goshawk post-fledging area (PFA) of a minimum of 200 acres that includes the three 30-acre nest sites selected. The large tree component within the PFA should include snags, down dead wood, and clumps of trees with interlocking crowns. Within the PFA, prohibit management activities that may degrade goshawk foraging habitat.

Need for Amendment: Based on existing historical data, northern goshawk nests are located near the portion of the Project located on the Medicine Bow NF; however, surveys conducted in 2010 for Segments 1W(a) and 1W(c) determined that these nests are no longer active. The 2010 surveys did confirm that goshawks still occupy the area (based on call back responses from goshawks on adjacent private land) and are likely still nesting in the area. Surveys are still needed for Segment 1E (which is located approximately 1,500 feet southeast of Segment 1W[c]) and Alternative 1E-C (which is located approximately 1,500 feet northwest of Segment 1W[a]). As goshawks likely nest in this general area, and Project construction would remove suitable goshawk habitat, a plan amendment is needed to allow the Project.

Habitat near historic northern goshawk nests would be disturbed during construction, which would result in a direct loss of habitat, as well as creating a potential to disturb birds in adjacent habitats. On the Medicine Bow NF, approximately 16 acres of forested habitat within 1 mile of historic nests would be impacted by construction along Segment 1E, 9 acres along Segment 1W(a), and 7 acres along Segment 1W(c). ROW maintenance would remove snags from the immediate footprint of the Project, further reducing habitat; however, snags would remain in forested areas that are located directly adjacent to the ROW and road footprints. In addition, shrub habitats that may currently serve as hunting habitats for the northern goshawk would also be impacted. (If Alternative 1E-C is selected rather than Segment 1E, it would remove approximately 7 acres of goshawk habitat on NFS land, 7 acres less than 1E). An amendment to the Medicine Bow Forest Plan allowing the Gateway West Project would be needed, which will follow timing restrictions for northern goshawks.

Mitigation: Design roads to avoid goshawk habitat to the extent feasible. Survey prior to construction during the appropriate season to identify active nests and follow Medicine Bow NF timing restrictions for northern goshawks (see additional mitigation in Table 2.7-1 of the Draft EIS).

Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species—Standard 11 (LRMP 1-44)

Standard: Allow no loss or degradation of known or historic habitat for the boreal toad, wood frog, or northern leopard frog.

Need for Amendment: Construction of the Project would disturb approximately 1 acre of wetland and riparian habitat on the Medicine Bow NF. This area provides suitable habitat for amphibian species such as the boreal toad, wood frog, and northern leopard frog. Therefore a plan amendment is required. An amendment would be needed allowing the Gateway West Transmission Line Project to be approved by the Medicine Bow Forest. Mitigation measures would be applied to reduce impacts to the boreal toad, wood frog, or northern leopard frog.

Mitigation: To minimize impacts to wetland and riparian habitat on the Medicine Bow NF, the Proponents would implement the Project Reclamation, Revegetation, and Weed Management Plan, which will include a site-specific plan for ROW vegetation management in riparian and wetland areas. Additionally, a buffer zone of 25 feet would be observed where physically and economically feasible. Where impacts cannot be avoided, a site-specific crossing plan and measures to mitigate impacts will be submitted to the Forest for approval. Crossing plans will demonstrate that vegetation removal is minimized, show how sediment would be controlled during construction and operation within wetland and riparian areas, attempt to intersect the wetland or riparian habitat at its edge, and provide measures to restore habitat and ensure conservation of riparian microclimates. To further reduce impacts, topsoil in affected wetlands shall be segregated during construction and reapplied during restoration.

Scenery Management, Standard 1 (LRMP 1-56)

Standard: Apply the Scenery Management System (SMS) to all NFS lands. Travel routes, use areas, and waterbodies determined to be of primary importance are a concern Level 1 and appropriate Scenic Integrity Objectives (SIOs) are established according to the SMS.

Need for Amendment: The SMS was used to identify effects to SIOs. The Project crosses two MAs:

- MA 3.31—Back Country Recreation-Year-round Motorized with a Moderate SIO.
- MA 8.3—Utility Corridors with an SIO of “compatible with adjacent management areas.”

A Plan amendment is required because Segment 1E, which crosses MA 3.31 for approximately 2.7 miles (or 1E-C, which crosses MA 3.31 for approximately 2 miles), is not consistent with the SIO. Forest Plan direction states the SIO of Moderate is “Management activities remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape being viewed. Activities may repeat form, line, color, or texture common to the characteristic landscape but may not change in their qualities of size, amount, intensity, direction, pattern, etc.” Transmission lines are considered inconsistent with the SIO of Moderate (Forest Plan p. 3.2-70).

Segments 1W(a) and 1W(c) each cross approximately 2.3 miles of NFS land classified as MA 8.3. MA 8.3 allows development in utility corridors to be obvious and to

dominate foreground views; however, the development must be consistent with the SIOs of adjacent MAs. The adjacent area is MA 3.31 where the SIO is Moderate; therefore, Segments 1W(a) and 1W(c) are inconsistent with Forest Plan direction. An amendment would be needed for a one-time allowance to permit the Gateway West Project to cross areas managed according to Moderate SIOs. Refer to Appendix G-2 for the scenery analysis.

Mitigation: To minimize visual impacts, the following Forest Plan Guideline will be followed: Crossing the Medicine Bow NF along a transmission corridor shall require the preparation of a vegetation management plan for the utility corridor to minimize scenic impacts and plan for rehabilitation of existing impacts. This vegetation management plan would be proposed between mileposts (MPs) 27.0 to 30.0 of Segment 1W(c) and MPs 28.0 through 31.0 of Segment 1W(a).

The following additional mitigation would also be implemented: 1) new towers shall be similar to the existing towers to reduce contrast; 2) a construction and maintenance plan shall be developed and approved by the Forest Service prior to construction to reduce ROW scarring and enhance restoration; 3) no paint or permanent coloring agents shall be applied to mark the clearing area boundary; 4) the edges of the cleared area shall be feathered to give a natural appearance; 5) access roads shall follow landform contours where practicable to minimize ground disturbance and reduce scarring (visual contrast); and 6) the towers shall have a dull galvanized coating and insulators would be made of non-reflective material.

Management Area Prescriptions—3.31 Backcountry Recreation, Year-Round Motorized, General, Standard 1 (RLRMP 2-34)

Standard: Allow uses and activities only if they do not degrade the primitive character of the area.

Need for Amendment: Approximately 2.7 miles of Segment 1E (or 2 miles of Alternative 1E-C if selected rather than 1E) cross the Forest where it is currently allocated to MA 3.31—Backcountry Recreation, Year-round Motorized and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) classification is Semi-primitive Motorized. Within this ROS classification, alterations should not draw the attention of motorized observers on trails and primitive roads within the area and structures should be rare and isolated. By not maintaining the primitive character of the area, the Project would be inconsistent with the Forest Plan and would require a plan amendment.

If Segment 1E is approved, Sections 13, 14, 23, and 24, Township (T) 30N Range (R) 78W, and the west halves of sections 18 and 19, T30N R77W would be allocated to MA 8.3—Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites. If Alternative 1E-C is selected instead of Proposed Route 1E, only Sections 13, 14, 23, and 24, T30N R78W would be allocated to MA 8.3. The ROS classification for MA 8.3 is Roaded Natural; under this classification modifications may be easily noticed and strongly dominant to observers within the area.

Mitigation: Visual mitigation measures will be implemented, as described above, resulting in development of a construction and maintenance plan to reduce ROW scarring and enhance restoration; no permanent marking for clearing area boundary; feathering the ROW edges for a more natural appearance; following landforms, when

practicable, when constructing access roads; and constructing the towers with dull galvanized coating and making the insulators out of non-reflective material. Mitigation measures, listed in Table 2.7-1 of the Draft EIS, would be followed, where appropriate.

3.1.3 Amendment Applicability

This amendment to Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and as included under the special use permit. Lands not analyzed must undergo analysis following Guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 228.102 prior to any additional authorizations. Those lands not impacted by the special use permit and authorization shall continue to be managed under the existing management prescriptions, Standards, and Guidelines.

3.1.4 NEPA Analysis

The NEPA evaluation of this proposed amendment, as called for by 36 CFR Part 219, Section 219.10(f), has been performed as part of the Gateway West Project EIS process. As part of the proposed plan amendment evaluation, a determination as to whether the proposed amendment is a significant or non-significant amendment to the current plan will be made and documented in the ROD for the Project. This amendment is consistent with the NEPA, 40 CFR parts 1500 to 1508, Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15 (09/20/10) and 26 CFR 220.

3.1.5 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-2 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation. A summary of effects specific to the above proposed amendments is presented below.

Amending Standards 4 and 5 of the Forest Plan would result in direct loss of habitat and physical disturbance to northern goshawks within and adjacent to the planning area (as is discussed above). Effects of this disturbance may include avoidance of previous nesting areas by birds that would otherwise have used existing nests. Reduction of forest cover due to ROW maintenance could further affect behavior and habitat suitability. Where shrub habitats are disturbed, the disruption to prey species could result in impact on northern goshawk by altering prey behaviors and thus availability.

Amending Standard 11 of the Forest Plan to allow the Gateway West Project in areas would likely result in disturbance of approximately 1 acre of wetland and riparian habitat. Mitigation measures would aim to minimize disturbance; however, some loss of habitat is likely to occur. This could negatively impact the local population within the affected area due to changes in vegetation cover, water quality, and surface disturbance.

Permitting the Project as a one-time allowance through areas with a Moderate SIO would result in impacts to scenic values that are not consistent with a Moderate SIO. The presence of additional transmission lines would detract from the natural setting and likely impact the visual experience for recreational users of the NF. Mitigation measures and the remoteness of the area would likely result in relatively few viewers impacted,

however the presence of multiple new transmission lines through the forest would increase the visual impact of the existing ROW.

Changing the MA from 3.31 to 8.3 would allow for different management objectives within the utility corridor designation. This designation would allow for higher visibility of man-made structures as well as allow for new road construction. Alterations to the landscape are not required to maintain the primitive characteristic of the area, and thus both the physical and visual characteristics of the landscape could be altered. Reclassification of the area also allows for additional actions that would not be consistent with MA 3.31 but are consistent with 8.3, which could create additional impacts to the surrounding area. This would affect recreational users as well as wildlife within the land adjacent to the reclassified area.

3.2 CARIBOU FOREST PLAN

Digest: Establishes a new corridor of Management 8.1—Concentrated Development Area, to authorize transmission line construction, operations, and maintenance on Caribou NF³, Idaho.

3.2.1 Reason for Amendment

Portions of Segment 4 of the Project cross areas of the Forest currently designated as Management Prescriptions 5.2—Forest Vegetation Management, 2.7.2 (Elk and Deer Winter Range), and 3.2—Semi-Primitive Recreation. To be consistent with Forest Plan direction, an amendment is needed to designate the ROW for the proposed double circuit 500 kV line as Prescription 8.1—Concentrated Development Areas.

This amendment to the *Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest*⁴ (hereafter referred to as the Caribou Forest Plan) would allow for approval of a special use permit for the construction and operations of the Project on the Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee NF, Idaho. Currently, the BLM is the lead agency preparing a Draft EIS on an application from the Proponents for a ROW grant to use the National System of Public Lands for portions of the Project in Idaho and Wyoming. The application was originally submitted to the BLM in May 2007, and most recently was revised in January 2010 to reflect refinements in the proposed Project. Approximately 9.2 miles of the proposed 1,103-mile transmission line are located on the Caribou NF.

As a cooperating agency, the Forest Service has and will continue to participate in all aspects of the environmental analysis, and will use the EIS as a basis for its decision regarding issuance of the special use permit and determining under what terms and conditions the permit should be issued. The Caribou Forest Plan establishes management direction including Standards and Guidelines for land and resource management on the Forest (36 CFR 219). Under the NFMA, consistency with these Standards and Guidelines must be demonstrated prior to project approval (16 U.S.C. 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e)). The Forest Plan may be amended to permit projects

³ While the Caribou NF and Targhee NF are managed as one unit, the land and resource management plan discussed in this amendment applies only to the Caribou portion of the NF.

⁴ Forest Service. 2003. Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Caribou National Forest. Intermountain Region, Idaho Falls, Idaho. February.

that are inconsistent with Forest Plan direction (36 CFR 219.10[f] and Caribou Forest Plan pages 1-3 and 1-4).

The NEPA analysis for the Project indicates that approval of the special use permit would be inconsistent, in some instances, with Standards and Guidelines in the Caribou Forest Plan.

3.2.2 Forest Plan Direction to be Amended

This amendment to the Caribou Forest Plan would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and only to Project decisions on those lands. NFS lands not analyzed must undergo analysis following Guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 220 prior to any additional authorizations.

Management Prescriptions, a set of management practices, are applied to a specific area of land to attain multiple-use and other goals and objectives. They identify the emphasis and focus of multiple-use management activities in a specific area; however, emphasis, as used in this context, is defined as a focus or a highlight and does not necessarily mean exclusive use. The specific direction stated in a management prescription determines what uses are allowed and to what extent the uses are permitted. Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines apply unless specified in the Management Prescription direction.

Standards are used to promote the achievement of the desired future conditions and objectives at the Forest or Management Prescription level. Standards are binding limitations on management activities that are within the authority of the Forest Service to enforce. A Standard can also be expressed as a constraint on management activities or practices (Forest Plan, pg. 3-1). Exceptions to Standards require analysis to be disclosed in a NEPA document and a Forest Plan Amendment.

Guidelines are used in the same way as Standards but tend to be operationally flexible to respond to variations, such as changing site conditions or changed management circumstances. Under the Caribou Forest plan, Guidelines are a preferred or advisable course of action, and they are expected to be carried out, unless site-specific analysis identifies a better approach (Forest Plan, pg. 3-1). Exceptions to Guidelines require the analysis be disclosed in a NEPA document and a Forest Plan Amendment is needed unless a better site-specific approach is identified in the NEPA document.

Scenic Resources, Guideline 2 (RFP 3-40)

Guideline: Until the SMS is fully implemented, projects should be planned and implemented to meet the Visual Quality Objectives (VQOs) as displayed on the Forest VQO map.

Need for Amendment: Although three transmission lines and State Route 36 cross the Forest within 1 to 4 miles of the proposed ROW, the portion of the Forest crossed by the Project has VQOs of Retention and Partial Retention. Management activities in areas classified as Retention should not be evident to the casual Forest visitor. Management activities in areas classified as Partial Retention may be evident but should be subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The Proponents have worked with the Forest Service to site the proposed transmission line to minimize visual impacts; however, the transmission line does not conform to the Retention or Partial Retention

VQOs. Therefore, a Project-level management plan amendment to change the ROW to Prescription 8.1, allowing the project as a visually altering action without redesignating the VQO for the area, would be required. Refer to Appendix G-2 for the scenery analysis.

Mitigation: To mitigate potential visual impacts from Segment 4 within the Forest, the following measures shall be implemented: 1) a construction and maintenance plan shall be developed and approved by the Forest Service prior to construction to reduce ROW scarring and enhance restoration; 2) no paint or permanent coloring agents shall be applied to mark the clearing area boundary; 3) the edges of the cleared area shall be feathered to give a natural appearance; 4) access roads shall follow landform contours where practicable to minimize ground disturbance and reduce scarring (visual contrast); and 5) the towers shall have a dull galvanized coating and insulators would be made of non-reflective material. See Table 2.7-1 in the Draft EIS for additional mitigation measures.

Recreation. Guideline 4, (RFP 3-40)

Guideline: Projects should be planned and implemented to meet the ROS as depicted on the Forest ROS map.

Need for Amendment: Approximately 84 percent of the segment crossing the Caribou NF (7.7 miles) crosses lands allocated to the Roded Natural ROS class. The remainder (1.5 miles) is allocated to Semi-Primitive Motorized. An estimated 11.1 miles of new road would be required along the portion of Segment 4 that crosses the Caribou NF, and an estimated 4.3 miles of existing road would require improvement. Semi-Primitive Motorized is defined as having a natural setting with moderately dominant alterations that would not draw the attention of motorized observers on trails and primitive roads within the area. Structures are rare and isolated. The transmission line and new or improved roads associated with the Project would not be compatible with the Semi Primitive Motorized ROS designation. The Caribou Forest Plan would be amended to change the area within 500 feet of the transmission line and new permanent roads to Roded Natural (affecting approximately 835 acres).

Mitigation: Temporary roads would be decommissioned using Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. Roads needed for future access to the towers would be reduced to an 8-foot width and revegetated using low-growing plants. The remainder of the roadway would be restored to the extent feasible. See Table 2.7-1 in the Draft EIS for additional mitigation measures.

Table 3.5 Management Standards and Guidelines within Active Goshawk Nesting Territories (RFP 3-30).

The management Standards and Guidelines in Table 3.5, Management Standards and Guidelines within Active Goshawk Nesting Territories (Forest Plan page 3-30), apply to all forest types within active and historic goshawk nesting territories.

Need for Amendment: Surveys and historical data indicate that the area is occupied. Four nests have been identified on NFS land. Foraging habitat for northern goshawks would be disturbed during construction, which would result in a direct loss of habitat, as

well as potentially disturbing birds in adjacent habitats. About 33 acres would be impacted within 1 mile of nests along Segment 4 on the Caribou NF. The initial clearing, as well as ROW maintenance would remove snags from the immediate footprint of the Project, thereby further reducing habitat. In addition, shrub habitats would also be impacted on NFS land, which may currently serve as hunting habitat for the northern goshawk. Approximately 82 acres of goshawk habitat would be impacted within the 5,400 acres of foraging area on the Caribou NF. Because this is greater than the limit of 40 acres, the Project is not in compliance with the Caribou Forest Plan. Therefore, a plan amendment is needed to allow the Project with mitigation where it would otherwise not comply with the Forest Plan.

Mitigation: Design roads to avoid goshawk habitat to the extent feasible. Survey prior to construction during the appropriate season to identify active nests and follow timing restrictions for nesting goshawks. See Table 2.7-1 in the Draft EIS for additional mitigation measures.

Proposed Amendment

Designate a new corridor of Management Prescription 8.1—Concentrated Development Area. The corridor will be 9.2 miles long by 300 feet wide; the area within 500 feet of the transmission line and new access roads will have an ROS of Roaded Natural. Standards and Guidelines for protecting goshawk foraging habitat will not apply within the corridor. Access roads necessary to construct and maintain the transmission line will remain in their respective Management Prescription (5.2, 2.7.2 or 3.2) and managed to be compliant with that Prescription.

3.2.3 Amendment Applicability

This amendment to the Caribou Forest Plan management prescriptions would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and as included under the special use permit. Lands not analyzed must undergo analysis following Guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 220 prior to any additional authorizations. Those lands not impacted by the special use permit and authorization shall continue to be managed under the existing management prescriptions, Standards, and Guidelines.

3.2.4 NEPA Analysis

The NEPA evaluation of this proposed amendment, as called for by 36 CFR Part 219, Section 219.10(f), has been performed as part of the Gateway West Project EIS process. As part of the proposed plan amendment evaluation, a determination as to whether the proposed amendment is a significant or non-significant amendment to the current plan will be made and documented in the ROD for the Project. This amendment is consistent with NEPA, 40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508, FSH 1909.15 (09/20/10), and 26 CFR 220.

3.2.5 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-2 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and

Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation. A summary of effects specific to the above proposed amendments is presented below.

Designating a new corridor within the NF would create a new linear disturbance in addition to an area that currently contains existing corridors. This could have effect on both wildlife and recreational users. Changing the management to Concentrated Development would allow additional actions that could impact wildlife and scenic values within the area.

Changing the ROS to Roaded Natural would permit road building within the redesignated portions. This would likely impact recreational users due to changes in scenic qualities as well as road use and noise, especially during construction. Unauthorized use of Project roads may also occur, which could lead to both safety and environmental concerns. Effects on wildlife could include avoidance of the area due to noise and disturbance, changes in habitat suitability for both predator and prey species, as well as effects of fragmentation.

The Project would affect 82 acres of northern goshawk foraging habitat. Amending the Caribou Forest Plan to permit this disturbance could result in decreased hunting efficiency for northern goshawk using land adjacent to and within the project area. This could lead to increased time being required for foraging which could impact overall productivity.

3.3 SAWTOOTH NATIONAL FOREST

Digest: Modifies Management Direction to authorize transmission line construction, operation and maintenance on Sawtooth NF, Idaho.

3.3.1 Reason for Amendment

This amendment to the *Revised Forest Plan for the Sawtooth National Forest*⁵ (hereafter referred to as the Sawtooth Forest Plan) would allow for approval of a special use permit for the construction and operation of the Project on the Sawtooth NF, Idaho. The application was originally submitted to the BLM in May 2007, and most recently was revised in January 2010 to reflect refinements in the proposed Project. The Proposed Route does not cross the Sawtooth NF; however, three alternatives to Segment 7 of the Proposed Route (Alternatives 7H, 7I, and 7J) do cross the Forest.

Alternative 7H crosses two divisions of the Sawtooth NF, the Sublett and Albion Mountain Divisions, for a total distance of 11.4 miles, and passes within 0.5 mile of the northern boundary of the Black Pine Division. Alternative 7H crosses 7.2 miles of NFS lands allocated to MA 6.1—Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Shrubland and Grassland Landscapes; 2.7 miles of land allocated to MA 4.2—Roaded Recreation Emphasis; and 1.5 miles allocated to MA 5.1—Restoration and Maintenance Emphasis within Forested Landscapes.

The Sawtooth Forest Plan uses the ROS system to manage recreation opportunities on the Forest. Alternative 7H crosses approximately 7.0 miles allocated to the Roaded

⁵ Forest Service. 2003. Revised Land and Resource Management Plan, Sawtooth National Forest, Intermountain Region, Twin Falls, Idaho July.

Natural ROS class, 4.1 miles allocated to Roaded Modified, and 0.2 mile allocated to Semi-Primitive Motorized. These are the summer allocations. In winter, the areas crossed by Alternative 7H are entirely allocated to Semi-Primitive Motorized because existing roads are closed. An estimated 11.5 miles of new road would be required along the portion of Alternative 7H that crosses the Sawtooth NF. If Alternative 7H is authorized, land that is currently allocated to Semi-Primitive Motorized and within 0.5 mile of a new road or the proposed ROW would not be consistent with Semi-Primitive Motorized (approximately 1,234 acres). Alternative 7H would cross an area classified as having a VQO of Partial Retention (4.0 miles in the Sublett Division and 2.9 miles in the Albion Mountain Division), where management activities are required to remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. It would also cross areas classified as Modification in the Albion Mountain Division (1.5 miles). The Project would not be consistent with these VQOs.

Alternative 7I crosses two divisions of the Sawtooth NF—the Sublett and Cassia Divisions—for a total distance of 29.6 miles, and passes within 0.5 mile of the northern boundary of the Black Pine Division. Alternatives 7H, 7I, and 7J share the same alignment where they cross the Sublett Division. An estimated 30.2 miles of new road would be required for the portion of Alternative 7I that crosses the Sawtooth NF. If Alternative 7I is authorized, land that is currently allocated to Semi-Primitive Motorized and within 0.5 mile of a new road or the proposed transmission line would not be consistent with Semi-Primitive Motorized (approximately 8,465 acres). Alternative 7I would also cross areas classified as Modification (5.2 miles in the Cassia Division) and Partial Retention (4.0 miles in the Sublett Division and 0.8 miles in the Cassia Division), where management activities are required to remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The Project would not be consistent with these VQOs.

Alternative 7J shares the same alignment as 7I until MP 137.2, at which point it turns west, crossing approximately 0.2 additional mile of Sawtooth NF before leaving the NF and crossing BLM-managed and private lands. Alternative 7J would cross areas classified as Modification (2.2 miles in the Cassia Division) and Partial Retention (4.0 miles in the Sublett Division, and 0.1 mile in the Cassia Division), where management activities are required to remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape. The Project would not be consistent with these VQOs.

The NEPA analysis for the Project indicates that approval of the special use permit would be inconsistent, in some instances, with Standards and Guidelines in the Sawtooth Forest Plan. Thus, the required plan amendment and associated mitigation are described herein.

3.3.2 Standards to be Amended

This amendment to Plan Standards would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and only to Project decisions on those lands. Lands not analyzed must undergo analysis following Guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 228.102 prior to any additional authorizations.

Standards are actions that must be followed or are required limits to activities in order to achieve Forest goals. Deviations from Standards must be analyzed and documented in a Forest Plan amendment.

Guidelines under the Sawtooth Forest Plan are advisable courses of action that should be followed to achieve Forest goals. Deviations from Guidelines must be analyzed during project-level analysis and documented in a project decision document but do not require a Forest Plan amendment.

Management Direction for Scenic Environment – SCST01

Standard: All projects shall be designed to meet the adopted VQOs as displayed on the Forest VQO map. Portions of Route Alternative are currently designated as Partial Retention. There should be minimal distraction from scenic quality in the foreground from road construction, reconstruction, and other excavation management. Roads and other excavation may be visible in the middleground and background landscapes, but should blend into the characteristic landscape of the surroundings. Portions of Route Alternatives are also currently designated as Modification. Management activities may dominate the characteristic landscape but must use naturally established form, line, color, and texture. They should appear as a natural occurrence when viewed as middleground. Refer to Appendix G-2 of the Draft EIS for an analysis of the visual effects on NFS lands.

Need for Amendment: Alternatives 7H, 7I, or 7J (if selected) would not meet Modification or Partial Retention VQOs where they cross the Sawtooth NF. If one of these alternatives is approved, a plan amendment is needed to permit the crossing of these VQOs by the Project as a one-time allowance without changing the management prescription.

Mitigation: To minimize visual impacts, the following measures shall be implemented: 1) a construction, restoration, maintenance, and monitoring plan shall be developed by the Proponents and approved by the Forest Service prior to construction to reduce ROW scarring and enhance restoration; 2) new towers shall be similar to the existing towers to reduce contrast; 3) no paint or permanent coloring agents shall be applied to mark the clearing area boundary; 4) the edges of the cleared area shall be feathered to give a natural appearance; 5) access roads shall follow landform contours where practicable to minimize ground disturbance and reduce scarring (visual contrast); and 6) the towers shall have a dull galvanized coating and insulators shall be made of non-reflective material. See Table 2.7-1 in the Draft EIS for additional mitigation measures.

Management Direction for Recreational Resources – REGU08, REGU 10, and REGU 12

Standard: All projects and activities should maintain or enhance the adopted ROS classes as displayed on the Forest ROS strategy maps. New road construction should not occur within the summer Primitive and Semi-Primitive Motorized areas. Facilities identified as being necessary should blend with the surrounding landscape character and the ROS setting.

Need for Amendment: Portions of Alternatives 7H or 7I, if selected, would not be consistent with the management Standard for summer Primitive and Semi-Primitive Motorized areas. The affected area (at least 500 feet on each side of the transmission line and along new permanent roads) would be designated (mapped) as Roded Natural.

Mitigation: Temporary roads would be decommissioned using Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines. Roads needed for future access to the towers would be reduced to an 8-foot width and revegetated using low-growing plants. The remainder of the roadway would be restored to the extent feasible. See Table 2.7-1 in the Draft EIS for additional mitigation measures.

3.3.3 Amendment Applicability

This amendment to the Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines would apply only for those lands identified in the Gateway West Final EIS and ROD, and as included under the special use permit. Lands not analyzed must undergo analysis following Guidelines set forth in 36 CFR 228.102 prior to any additional authorizations. Those lands not impacted by the special use permit and authorization shall continue to be managed under the existing management prescriptions, Standards, and Guidelines.

3.3.4 NEPA Analysis

The NEPA evaluation of this proposed amendment, as called for by 36 CFR Part 219, Section 219.10(f), has been performed as part of the Gateway West Project EIS process. As part of the proposed plan amendment evaluation, a determination as to whether the proposed amendment is a significant or non-significant amendment to the current plan will be made and documented in the ROD for the Project. This amendment is consistent with NEPA, 40 CFR Parts 1500 to 1508, FSH 1909.15 (09/20/10), and 26 CFR 220.

3.3.5 Effects

The direct and indirect effects of this Project are discussed in Chapter 3 of the Draft EIS. Cumulative effects are discussed in Chapter 4. Refer to Sections 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3 and Appendix G-2 for an analysis of the effects on visual resources; Sections 3.6.2.2 and 3.6.2.3 for effects on vegetation; Sections 3.10.2.2 and 3.10.2.3 for effects on wildlife; Sections 3.11.2.2 and 3.11.2.3 for effects on special status species; and Sections 3.17.3.2 and 3.17.3.3 for effects on land use and recreation. A summary of effects specific to the above proposed amendments is presented below.

Permitting a one-time allowance for the Gateway West Project through areas designated as Partial Retention and Modification where it would otherwise not be in compliance with the visual objectives for the areas would likely result in a change affecting the visual experience for recreational users. Where Alternative 7H crosses the Albion Division, it follows an existing dirt road for much of its route. The addition of a transmission line to this roadway would likely increase the road's visibility from viewpoints, such as Mt. Harrison (see Appendix G-2, Figure ST-2d). ROW clearing would result in high visibility of the Project in forested areas such as the joint 7H/7I/7J alignment through the Sublett Division.

Changing the ROS to Roaded Natural would change the management requirements for the affected areas, allowing more disturbances from road building and altering use restrictions. This could impact recreation, visual, and plant and wildlife resources as discussed in the relevant sections of the Draft EIS. Where Alternative 7H crosses the Albion Division, these effects may be more apparent due to the route being located between two roadless areas.