

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT  
Twin Falls District  
Shoshone Field Office  
400 West F Street  
Shoshone, Idaho 83352**

**CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION REVIEW SHEET**

**NEPA No. DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2010-0041-CX**

**A. Project Description**

The Shoshone Field Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has received a right-of-way application from Idaho Power Company (IPC) to renew and combine rights-of-way IDI-0-11477 and IDI-16937. The right-of-way grant identified as IDI-0-11477 is for a portion of the 46 kV power line known as Shoshone Falls to Jerome Junction. The grant was issued in 1960 for a term of 50 years and consists of a 16.05 acre corridor that is 3.31 miles long and 40 feet wide. The right-of-way grant IDI-16937 is for a portion of the 46 kV power line known as Shoshone Falls to Shoshone City #1. This right-of-way was issued in 1981 for a term of 30 years and covered an area approximately 9.3 miles long by 50 feet wide. However, because part of this right-of-way was relinquished and another portion was included in a patent to the State of Idaho the right-of-way IDI-16937 currently consists of a 14.92 acre corridor that is approximately 2.46 miles long by 50 feet wide.

The proposed action is to renew and authorize both of these 46 kV power lines under one right-of-way grant. The combined right-of-way would include the area in-between the power lines and 25 feet on the exterior of both lines. This would equate to a right-of-way corridor that is 3.31 miles long and 80 to 160 feet wide totaling approximately 47.8 acres. The width of the right-of-way will be less where the power-lines are adjacent to or on the border of lands not within BLM's management.

**B. Consideration of Extraordinary Circumstances**

This Categorical Exclusion Review Sheet documents the review of the proposed action to determine if any of the extraordinary circumstances described in 516 DM 2, Appendix 2 apply. If any of the extraordinary circumstances apply to the proposed action, then an EA or EIS must be prepared. Any evidence or concerns that one or more of the exceptions may apply must be brought to the attention of the manager who is authorized to approve the proposed action.

1. The proposed action would not have any significant impacts on public health or safety.

The operation and maintenance of the power lines would not have any significant impacts on public health and safety. The right-of-way would contain terms, conditions and stipulations that would require IPC to comply with Federal and State standards for public health and safety, environmental protection, operation, and maintenance. The authorized officer has the ability to suspend or terminate in whole or in part the right-of-way grant if unforeseen

conditions arise which result in the approved terms and conditions being inadequate to protect the public health and safety or to protect the environment.

2. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas.

A review of cultural resources within the right-of-way area identified that the transmission lines cross over two cultural resources: 1) the North Alternate of the Oregon Trail and 2) the Starr's Ferry Wagon Road. The lines also come within 50 meters of site 10JE565. All of these sites are considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Within IPC's Plan of Development it is identified that known cultural resources will be marked as avoidance areas before any ground disturbing activities begin. Once the activity is complete or no longer poses a threat to the resource, the marking will promptly be removed. IPC will be responsible for assuring that personnel are well trained to recognize these markers and understand the equipment/vehicle movement restrictions involved. If IPC needs to complete activities within the restricted area, they will work with the BLM to determine appropriate measures that will allow the work to be completed.

The location of the rights-of-way proposed to be renewed is within a Recreation and Public Purposes (R&PP) lease area. The power lines were in place when the R&PP was developed and have not detracted from the uses identified within the R&PP's master plan.

The Snake River Plain Aquifer underlies the rights-of-way proposed for renewal. The Blue Lakes Aquifer is a sub-aquifer of the Snake River Plain Aquifer and provides ~70% of drinking and domestic water for the City of Twin Falls. No impact to this aquifer has been associated with the use of power lines within this area over the last 50 years.

A survey of the areas wildlife was conducted on June 8, 2011. Of the birds observed during the survey, 13 are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and additional species of migratory birds are expected to use the type of habitat that occurs near the right-of-way. Uses by migratory birds are seasonal. Within IPC's Plan of Development for these power lines it is identified IPC would avoid operational and maintenance (O&M) activities during the migratory bird nesting season from February 1 through July 31st, or until occupied nests are no longer active. If O&M and/or construction activities must take place during this timeframe an exception request must be submitted to the BLM in writing requesting a variance to the stipulation.

No refuge lands; wilderness areas, wild or scenic rivers, national natural landmarks, prime farmlands, floodplains (Executive Order 11988), national monuments, or other ecologically significant or critical areas are within the ROW area.

3. The proposed action would not have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources [NEPA Section 102(2)(E)].

The proposed action is in conformance with the Monument Resource Management Plan (RMP), approved in 1986. The RMP established the land use allocation and goals for the affected public land; as such, there are no unresolved conflict regarding other uses of these resources. Throughout the environmental process the proposal to authorize a right-of-way to Idaho Power Company for the operation and maintenance of the existing 46 kV power transmission lines was not highly controversial, nor are the effects expected to generate future controversy. The power lines were constructed in 1960 and 1981 and the BLM is not aware of any controversy surrounding the use of these lines between then and the present time.

4. The proposed action would not have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks.

The use of these power lines has been occurring in the project area since 1960 and 1981 without involving highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or unique or unknown environmental risks. Through initial impact assessments and a current review of potential impacts the renewal of these rights-of-ways would not involve highly uncertain or potentially significant environmental effects.

5. The proposed action would not establish a precedent for future actions or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.

The renewal of this right-of-way represents a site-specific decision that does not set precedence for future actions or present a decision in principle about a future consideration. Any proposed future projects must be evaluated on their own merits and effects.

6. The proposed action would not have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects.

The renewal of the right-of-ways for these power lines are not expected to have impacts other than what have been occurring over the past 50 and 30 years. During this time no cumulatively significant environmental effects have been observed.

7. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by either the bureau or office.

As stated above, a review of cultural resources within the right-of-way area identified that the transmission lines cross over two cultural resources: 1) the North Alternate of the Oregon Trail and 2) the Starr's Ferry Wagon Road. The lines also come within 50 meters of site 10JE565. All of these sites are considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). Within IPC's Plan of Development it is identified that known cultural resources will be marked as avoidance areas before any ground disturbing activities begin. Once the

activity is complete or no longer poses a threat to the resource, the marking will promptly be removed. IPC will be responsible for assuring that personnel are well trained to recognize these markers and understand the equipment/vehicle movement restrictions involved. If IPC needs to complete activities within the restricted area, they will work with the BLM to determine appropriate measures that will allow the work to be completed.

8. The proposed action would not have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species.

No sensitive plant species have been documented within one mile of the transmission lines (Idaho Conservation Database 2011) and no sensitive plant species were observed along the ROW during the June 8, 2011 survey. Data from the IDFG Conservation Data Center (2010) indicate the presence of Giant helleborine within one mile of the ROW. The small weedy roadside wetland is the only potential habitat for Giant helleborine; however, it was not observed. No other special status plant habitat was documented as occurring within the ROW.

No sensitive wildlife species or sign were observed along the ROW during the June 8, 2011 survey. The wildlife habitat in the project area for sagebrush obligate species was assessed as poor during the June 8, 2011 survey, due to the low abundance and patchy nature of sagebrush, and the abundance of annual weedy grasses along the ROW. There is little shrub cover. The annual grassland vegetation is dominated by non-native grasses and forbs providing minimal food, cover, or breeding habitat for shrub-steppe wildlife species. Small patches of perennial grasslands provide fair habitat for species that nest or forage in grasslands. Overall, the site would provide only marginal breeding habitat, food, or cover for wildlife adapted to the shrub-steppe habitats. The rocky outcrops and cliff faces adjacent to the Snake River by the southern portion of the ROW provide moderate to good quality nesting and roosting habitat for wildlife such as golden eagles and spotted bats.

If previously unknown sensitive plant or wildlife species, including threatened and endangered, are discovered during Operational and Management (O&M) and/or construction activities IPC will establish a spatial buffer zone and immediately contact the BLM. Unless IPC is informed otherwise, activities outside the buffer area may continue. If IPC needs to complete activities within the buffer area, they will work with the BLM to determine appropriate measures that will allow the work to be completed. Prior to the relocation or removal of bird nests, IPC will coordinate with the BLM as well as acquire the appropriate permits from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and/or the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

9. The proposed action would not violate a Federal law, or a State, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.

The BLM issues right-of-way grants accordance with Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and the BLM regulations at 43 CFR 2800. Under these regulations the right-of-way grant would specify that all applicable Federal, State and local laws be

adhered to. The BLM has the ability to suspend and/or terminate the right-of-way if a Federal, State or local laws is violated. There are no tribal laws in effect for the project area.

10. The proposed action would not have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (Executive Order 12898).

No impacts have been identified to low income or minority populations as a result of the previous authorization of these right-of-ways and the any future impacts are not expected to have impacts on these groups because of the renewal of these right-of-ways.

11. The proposed action would not limit access to ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (Executive Order 13007).

The proposed action would not limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites. The use has been occurring in the project area since 1960 and 1981 without any conflicts being identified.

12. The proposed action would not contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112).

The right-of-way authorization would contain stipulations that would require IPC to be responsible for weed control on the disturbed areas within the limits of the right-of-way. Idaho Power Company will also be responsible for ensuring that the undercarriages of equipment and/or vehicles used in the operation and termination of the right-of-way be free of all soil and plant material prior to operating on public lands. In areas where high concentrations of noxious weeds are in the immediate area of mechanical operations IPC would be required to mow the weeds to ground level prior to the start of project activities. These stipulations/requirements would reduce the risk of introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious and non-native, invasive species.

### C. Consultation and Preparation

On June 15, 2012 a letter was sent to interested parties that included Jerome County Planning and Zoning, Jerome County Commissioners, Idaho Department of Lands, and Pres Co. Livestock Association. No comments were received as a direct result of this letter,

The following resource specialists had involvement in the preparation and review of the categorical exclusion and the review of extraordinary circumstances:

Name of Participant	Position Title	Involvement:
Kasey Prestwich	Realty Specialist/Project Lead	Preparer
Gary Wright	Wildlife Biologist	Reviewer
Lisa Cresswell	Archeologist/ NEPA Coordinator	Reviewer
Danelle Nance	Natural Resource Specialist	Reviewer