

Nevada Broadband Telemedicine Initiative Right-of-Way Project

Finding of No Significant Impact

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2011-0512-EA

March 2012



Background

The *Nevada Broadband Telemedicine Initiative* (Project) would connect, maintain and operate a statewide fiber optic telemedicine network and would serve a minimum of 36 hospitals and medical facilities, with additional capacity available to serve public safety entities, educational institutions, and Tribal governments. This Project is being funded by the Department of Commerce, National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). The NTIA is the federal lead for this Project. The Nevada Hospital Association was awarded a \$19.6 million federal grant to build fiber optic routes to connect communities between Reno and Boulder City, Nevada. Communities along Highways 80 and 50 (Elko and Ely) would also be connected by use of existing conduit.

The Project would construct and maintain new fiber optic cable between Reno and Boulder City, Nevada. The new fiber optic cable on BLM-managed lands would include: approximately 15 miles of new buried cable between Goldfield and Lida Junction; 309 miles of new aerial fiber optic cable connected to existing transmission poles; and seven miles of fiber optic cable in existing conduit.

Finding

Based on the analysis of potential environmental impacts in the Environmental Assessment for the *Nevada Broadband Telemedicine Initiative Environmental Assessment* (EA), DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2011-0512-EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action would not have a significant effect on the human environment. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) is not required for compliance with the National Environmental Policy of 1969 (NEPA). The BLM has participated as a Cooperating Agency in the development of the EA and hereby adopts the Final EA. The BLM has determined that the EA satisfies NEPA regulations and is consistent with the BLM NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1). The Carson City District was delegated as the BLM's lead office for this project by the Nevada State Office. As delegated lead for this project, Carson City District is responsible for signing this FONSI.

Context:

The Proposed Action and all alternatives span between Boulder City, Nevada in southern Nevada and Reno, Nevada in northern Nevada. This distance crosses many different ecological areas.

In southern Nevada, the climate is characterized by hot dry summers in the Las Vegas Valley which is frequently over 100 degrees F and cool winters. The freeze-free season is over 225 days. Precipitation averages less than five inches per year in the Las Vegas, Boulder City, and Pahrump areas. Near Mountain Springs on Highway 160, the higher elevation equates with higher precipitation of 10 to 15 inches per year. Precipitation falls during summer monsoons and winter storms.

In central, western and northern Nevada, the climate is characterized by hot dry summers and cold winters. The frost-free season is 100 to 70 days. Precipitation comes during the winter months and is typically five to 10 inches per year in the valleys and up to 20 inches per year on Hwy 395 between Reno and the Carson Valley.

The new fiber optic cable on BLM-managed lands would include: approximately 15 miles of new buried cable between Goldfield and Lida Junction; 309 miles of new aerial fiber optic cable connected to existing transmission poles; and seven miles of fiber optic cable in existing conduit. All areas are along road and highway corridors; placement of fiber optic cable would occur on existing transmission poles, and existing maintenance roads would be utilized.

Intensity:

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The installation of new broadband fiber in the western and southern Nevada would benefit hospitals, medical facilities, public safety entities, educational institutions and Tribal governments. Minor temporary impacts would occur along the U.S. Highway 95 corridor during installation of underground and overhead fiber optic lines. The corridors are highly disturbed, and overhead and underground utility lines are common.

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

The Proposed Action would have no effect on public health or safety on BLM-managed lands. Providing broadband served to unserved and underserved areas of western and southern Nevada and would serve a minimum of 36 hospitals and medical facilities, with additional capacity available to serve public safety entities, educational institutions, and Tribal governments.

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

No wetlands, park lands, prime or unique farmlands, wild and scenic rivers, ecological critical areas, would be affected by the Proposed Action. Historic and prehistoric cultural resources on that are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places (“historic properties”) on BLM-managed lands would not be affected by the Proposed Action. Although a small portion of new overhead fiber optic cable would cross through the Amargosa Mesquite ACEC, the cable would be attached to an existing transmission lined owned by Valley Electric. Access to the area would be by existing jeep trails and there would be no ground disturbing activities. A determination by NTIA has been made that there are no jurisdictional waters or wetlands in the project area subject to a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit.

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

The portion of the project area on BLM-managed lands is along highway and road corridors; the project area on BLM-managed lands is highly disturbed, and overhead and underground utility lines are common. The BLM provided the draft EA for 30-days public review and received no comments in opposition to this proposal.

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

The construction of overhead and underground utility lines on BLM-managed lands is a well understood activity. Overhead and underground utility lines already exist along the highway and road corridors. There are no uncertain or unknown risks.

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

The Proposed Action would not establish a precedent for future actions on BLM-managed lands. Any future proposals on BLM-managed lands would require project-specific NEPA analysis.

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

The Proposed Action on BLM-managed lands is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts.

8) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the NRHP or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.*

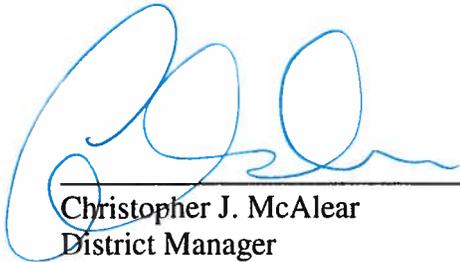
NTIA was the lead federal agency for compliance with the NHPA. The overhead portions of this project are exempt from Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) under an agreement between the national SHPO and NTIA. New underground sections on BLM-managed lands are limited to a short segment near Boulder City where the BLM has determined that no intact deposits remain, and a new underground section between Lida Junction and Goldfield where a BLM Class III inventory has been completed. No historic properties or otherwise sensitive cultural resources are known within the underground portions of the Proposed Action on BLM-managed lands.

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

The NTIA was the federal lead for compliance with the Endangered Species Act. The findings of the Biological Assessment submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) were as follows: “may affect but would not likely adversely affect the desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*); and no effect for the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*), yellow bellied cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*), and Yuma clapper rail (*Rallus longirostris yumanensis*).” The findings were concurred by the USFWS and a Biological Opinion for the Project was issued by USFWS on December 15, 2011. There is no designated critical habitat for listed species on BLM-managed lands.

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

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated RMP (2001), the Tonopah RMP and Record of Decision (ROD) (1997), and the Las Vegas RMP and Final Environmental Impact Statement (1998). The Proposed Action would not violate or threaten to violate any federal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment.



Christopher J. McAlear
District Manager
Carson City District Office

12 March 2012
Date