



United States Department of the Interior



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Alaska Energy Authority, Seismic Monitoring Site – Deadman Mountain Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2013-0022-DNA

Case File, AA-093598

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Background

On June 5, 2013, Alaska Energy Authority (applicant) submitted an application to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for a right-of-way for a seismic monitoring site. The site would support one of the study plans in conjunction with the application filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) for the Susitna-Watana hydroelectric Project. The applicant would like to install this site during the 2013 field season. Access to this site would occur by helicopter and the instruments would be checked 2 to 3 times per year. The station would remain in place permanently.

Finding of No Significant Impact

This action and its effects have been evaluated consistent with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for determining *significance*. Per 40 CFR § 1508.27, a determination of *significance* requires consideration of both context and intensity. The former refers to the relative context in which the action would occur such as society as a whole, affected region, affected interests, etc. The latter refers to the severity of the impact.

Context

The proposed right-of-way would be used to monitor seismic activity that could affect the potential for a hydro-electric project on the Susitna River. The project site consists of approximately one-half acre on a mountaintop in the remote Talkeetna Mountains. The proposed right-of-way would not affect local, regional, or national resources or interests. The right-of-way would benefit a state agency.

Intensity

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

The 2012 EA identifies limited adverse effects as a result of issuing the right-of-way (EA, pp. 5-6). Ultimately, the right-of-way would benefit the Alaska Energy Authority by providing a better understanding of seismic activity in this area. The 2013 DNA does not identify any further effects.

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

The Proposed Action identifies standard construction practices for developing the seismic monitoring site. The effects are limited to the immediate project footprint. Therefore, there is no potential for the Proposed Action to affect the health and safety of the public at large.

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

There are no parks, prime farmlands, or ecologically critical areas in proximity to the Proposed Action. Historic and cultural resources were not identified, neither internally or externally, as an issue for consideration in the 2012 EA (EA, pp. 2) nor was this raised as a concern during internal scoping for the current proposed action. A segment of the Nelchina caribou calving grounds are in the project area (EA, pp. 6-7). However, the Proposed Action prohibits ground disturbing activities and helicopter flights in the project area during the active caribou calving season. Therefore, effects to the Nelchina herd during this time will be minimized.

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

The anticipated effects are similar to many other right-of-way authorizations in remote geographic settings. No unique or appreciable scientific controversy has been identified regarding the effects of the Proposed Action or alternatives. The project area is remote and the concentration of recreational users near the site is very low.

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

Similar to Item 4 above, the anticipated effects are similar to many other right-of-way authorizations in central Alaska as well as in other remote geographic settings. The analysis has not shown that there would be any unique or unknown risks to the human environment.

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.

Per the East Alaska Resource Management Plan, the project area is open to multiple uses, including the requested use. This authorization is consistent with the Record of Decision for the

applicable land use plan. This project neither establishes a precedent nor represents a decision in principle about future actions.

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

The Proposed action is related to the Susitna-Watana hydro-electric project. However, the Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project is not wholly dependent on this seismic monitoring station.

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

“After discussions with Brian Carey on August 30, 2012, it was concluded that the undertaking would have minimal or less than one square meter of surface disturbance and thus have little likelihood of affecting cultural or paleontological resources,” (EA, pp. 2). Historic and cultural resources were not identified, neither internally or externally, as an issue for consideration in the 2012 EA (EA, pp. 2) or the 2013 DNA.

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

There are no Federally threatened or endangered species or habitat for these species within the project area (EA, p. 2).

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 and/or alternatives do not threaten to violate any law. The Proposed Action and alternatives are in compliance with the 43 CFR § 2800 regulations and are consistent with the East Alaska Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (2007), which provides direction for the protection of the environment on public lands (EA, pp. 2).

Conclusion

Therefore, on the basis of the information contained in the EA, and all other information available to me, it is my determination that:

1. None of the environmental effects identified meet the definition of significance as defined by context and intensity considerations at 40 CFR § 1508.27;
2. The alternatives are in conformance with the East Alaska Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (2007); and
3. The Proposed Action and alternatives do not constitute a major federal action having a significant effect on the human environment.

Therefore, neither Environmental Impact Statement nor a supplement to the existing EA is necessary and neither will be prepared.

/s/ Laurie Hull-Engles

July 15, 2013

Laurie Hull-Engles

Date

Acting Glennallen Field Manager

Attachments

BLM. 2013. Alaska Energy Authority Seismic Monitoring Site – Deadman Mountain, Determination of NEPA Adequacy (DNA) Worksheet, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2013-0022-DNA. July 2013.

BLM. 2012. Alaska Energy Authority Seismic Monitoring Site, Environmental Assessment, DOI-BLM-AK-A020-2012-0032-EA. September 2012.