



United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Shoshone Field Office
400 West F Street
Shoshone, Idaho 83352-5284
(208) 732-7200



In Reply Refer To:
2800 (IDT030)P

March 11, 2014

Scoping Information Package
Shoshone Field Office Right-of-Way Amendment Authorization

Dear Applicant & Interested Public:

This scoping information package summarizes a proposal to Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to amend an existing Idaho Power Company (Idaho Power or IPC) right-of-way grant (IDI-012961) across BLM administered lands within the Shoshone Field Office. This proposal is in accordance with 43 CFR 2800, and the 1984 Monument Resource Management Plan. Federal action must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this scoping package is to inform you and other interested and affected parties of this proposal, and to solicit your comments to assist us with the NEPA review of the proposal. In order for the Environmental Assessment (EA) to be completed in a timely fashion, please submit all comments by **April 8, 2014**.

The analysis of this proposal is currently ongoing, and will eventually be documented in an EA with an estimated completion date of February 2015. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the Proposed Action and to identify alternatives to the Proposed Action that meet the purpose of and need for the proposed action.

Documents for the project proposal will be made available on the BLM e-Planning website at:

https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do

The following page contains directions on how to find documents on the ePlanning website.

Please follow the steps below in order to find the King to Wood River (Line 433) 138 Kilovolt Transmission Line (IDI-012961) Amendment. The address above should be typed in its entirety, including the “**https://**” portion to ensure that you are directed correctly.

- 1) Under the “State(s)” field, select “**Idaho**”
- 2) Under the “Office(s)” field, select “**ID-Shoshone FO**”
- 3) Under the “Document Type(s)” field, select “**EA**”

- 4) Under the “Fiscal Year(s)” field, select “**2014**”
- 5) Under the “Program(s)” field, select “**Energy**”
- 6) When you have finished selecting all the fields, click “**Search**”
- 7) Click on “**#DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2014-0007-EA**”

PUBLIC INPUT NEEDED

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and preliminary alternatives. Clarifications to existing requests or additional requests received during this scoping period will also be considered. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received on or before **April 8, 2014**, and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA.

Written comments must be submitted to Elizabeth Maclean, Shoshone Field Manager, 400 West F Street, Shoshone, ID 83352. The office business hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf) to blm_wo_king_woodriver@blm.gov. E-mails submitted to e-mail addresses other than the one listed, in other formats than those listed, or containing viruses will be rejected. To be most helpful, comments sent electronically should include the title of this project “King to Wood River (Line 433) 138 Kilovolt Transmission Line (IDI-012961)” in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed in the Shoshone Field Office King to Wood River (Line 433) 138 Kilovolt Transmission Line (IDI-012961) EA.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold from public review your personal identifying information, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Dusty Parson, Realty Specialist/Idaho Power Right-of-Way Team Manager, 1387 S. Vinnell Way Boise, Idaho 83709, (208) 373-4068.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Maclean
Shoshone Field Manager

**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT**

Twin Falls District
Shoshone Field Office
400 West F Street
Shoshone, Idaho 83352

Scoping Information Package
King to Wood River (Line 433) 138 Kilovolt Transmission Line (IDI-012961)

This information package summarizes a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposal to amend an existing Idaho Power Company (Idaho Power or IPC) right-of-way grant (IDI-012961) in accordance with the 1984 Monument Resource Management Plan. Federal actions must be analyzed in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations to determine potential environmental consequences.

The purpose of this report is to inform interested and affected parties of the proposal and to solicit comments to assist with the NEPA review of the proposal. Analysis of the proposal is ongoing, and will be documented in an Environmental Assessment (EA) with an estimated completion date of February 2014. Comments received in response to this solicitation will be used to identify potential environmental issues related to the proposed action and to identify alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose of and need for the proposed action.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of this action is to respond to Idaho Power's application to amend a right-of-way (ROW) to upgrade existing electrical transmission facilities and widen the existing ROW. The need for this action is the BLM's obligation to respond to ROW requests, as set forth in Title V of the Federal Land and Policy Act of 1976 (43 U.S.C. 1761 et seq. (2012)).

Existing Condition

The project area is in the Shoshone Field Office which is generally located north of Twin Falls, south of Ketchum, east of King Hill, and west of Arco. The existing transmission line is located in Blaine, Camas, and Gooding Counties. The project falls within the plains and low hills of the Environmental Protection Agency Ecoregion 12 which is part of the xeric intermontane west. Ecoregion 12 is, in turn, comprised of the **Camas Prairie** ecoregion, the **Semiarid Foothills** ecoregion, the **Eastern Snake River Basalt Plains** ecoregion, and the **Mountain Home Uplands** ecoregion.

Where irrigation water and soil depth are sufficient, sugar beets, potatoes, alfalfa, small grains, or vegetables are grown. Elsewhere, livestock grazing is widespread. Cattle feedlots and dairy operations are found locally. Potential natural vegetation is mostly sagebrush steppe but barren lava fields and saltbush-greasewood also occur. In shallow, stony soils, that are unsuitable for cultivation, natural vegetation is mostly sagebrush and bunchgrass. In the higher and more rugged areas shallow, clayey soils are common and often support medusahead wildrye, cheatgrass, and scattered shrubs. Wildfire frequency is high.

Much of the project area is located within intact Wyoming sagebrush and Mountain sagebrush habitat and supports greater sage-grouse.

Proposed Action

Idaho Power Company (IPC) proposes to rebuild an existing 138,000 volt (138-kV) transmission line; widen the existing right-of-way from 60-feet to 100-feet; authorize existing access and service roads; and renew the right-of-way grant.

While the proposed line would be built to the same voltage as the existing line, there would be some differences between the existing and proposed facilities and maintenance activities. The existing structures are wood and the proposed structures would be weathering steel and would be typically five-feet taller, five-feet wider at the cross-arms, and three-feet wider at the base. All but three of the proposed structures would be placed on existing disturbed workpads, within 10-feet of existing structures. All of the proposed structures on public lands would be the same type of structure (e.g., replace H-frame with H-frame). One existing lattice structure, on private land, would be replaced with a five-pole structure to keep the conductor from hitting in wind events.

To facilitate construction, all structures would need vehicle access and because the proposed structures are steel and cannot be climbed, vehicle access would be necessary for future maintenance activities. IPC has requested a 14-foot wide road to accommodate construction and maintenance equipment. Current access roads are mostly primitive and vary in width and are typically 8 to 14-feet wide.

Construction would be phased over two years; this is to accommodate weather conditions, spatial and temporal restrictions, and budget requirements. Construction would start in 2015. Construction would not occur throughout the year, but would start in late spring and end in late fall each year.

Preliminary Issues

Preliminary issues identified through the BLM's internal scoping process in the Shoshone Field Office area are:

- Cultural Resources-Potential effects from the expansion of the right-of-way and installation of the upgraded facilities.
- Fish Habitat-Potential effects to streams crossed by the existing right-of-way.
- Threatened or Endangered Species-Potential effects to Canada lynx, Threatened; North American wolverine, Proposed Threatened; yellow-billed cuckoo, Proposed Threatened; Bliss rapids snail, Threatened; and greater sage-grouse, Candidate.
- Water Quality, Flood Plains, and Wetlands-Potential effects to streams crossed by the existing transmission line. The existing line crosses Four Mile Creek, Canyon Creek, East Black Canyon Creek, Turkey Creek, Schooler Creek, Thorn Creek, Lava Creek, Camas Creek, Little Poison Creek, Rock Creek, Croy Creek, and Big Wood River
- Sage-grouse – Potential effects to sage-grouse during breeding, nesting, and brood-rearing periods.
- Migratory Birds – Potential effects to migratory birds during nesting and brood-rearing periods.
- Bighorn Sheep – Potential effects from domestic sheep trailing through bighorn sheep habitat.
- Big Game – Potential effects during fawning/calving and wintering periods.
- Vegetation – Potential effects to vegetation.
- Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plants – Potential effects regarding noxious weeds and invasive plants.
- Recreation- During construction there may be some short-term impacts that would come in the form of use/user conflicts especially if construction occurs during hunting season.
- Visual Resources- The project area includes VRM Inventory and Management Classes II, III and IV.
- Soils – Potential soil erosion in areas recently burned by wildfire.

Conformance with Greater Sage-Grouse Management Policies and Procedures

This version of the Plan of Development has been prepared prior to the development of the EA for the King to Wood River Line and its identification and quantification of impacts to greater sage-grouse. As the EA is completed and impacts are more clearly articulated (e.g., the level of significance identified; BLM identifies an alternative in the Record of Decision for the BLM Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Land Use Plan Amendment/Environmental Impact Statement (LUPA/EIS)), the mitigation proposal will be revised as appropriate.

The proposed project must meet the BLM's objectives and goals for greater sage-grouse. Idaho Power has proposed the following goals for mitigation and comments received from public scoping will be considered in refining these goals and the methods used to reach these goals.

The goals proposed by Idaho Power are to:

- Address residual direct impacts such that the BLM can determine that the project meets the requirement in BLM IM 2012-043 to maintain or enhance sage-grouse habitat.
- Address the primary threats (fire and subsequent invasive grasses) to greater sage-grouse as identified by the USFWS.
- Address requirements that may be identified in the Final LUPA/EIS.
- Be consistent with the Idaho Sage-grouse State Advisory Committee Sage-grouse mitigation subcommittee mitigation framework.
- Be consistent with the BLM's Draft MS-1794-Regional Mitigation Manual Section.

Depending on the timing of the Final LUPA/EIS, implementation of the State of Idaho's mitigation program, and/or the completion of the BLM's Regional Mitigation Strategy (per Draft MS-1794), a program to accept funding for mitigation and/or identification of key mitigation locations and projects may be in-place when a decision is made on this project. Draft MS-1794 states that "... the BLM may accept an offer of monies from an applicant to fund specific mitigation projects, either on or off BLM-managed lands." The draft manual provides specific criteria that would be followed when developing the mitigation or financial contribution agreement. Alternatively, if the State of Idaho establishes a sage-grouse mitigation program, Idaho Power could pay into that program.

Idaho Power would, in order of preference, fund one of the following types of mitigation projects:

- Implement components of the BLM's burned area restoration plan for recent fires in the project vicinity; or
- Identify roads in the project vicinity that are no longer necessary and develop and implement a plan to restore the roads; or
- Develop and maintain fire breaks that protect Preliminary Priority Habitat (PPH) or core habitat (e.g., implement a portion of the Paradigm Project8).

The amount of funding would be based on the acres of impacts and level of significance (e.g., PPH and Preliminary General Habitat (PGH) would have different ratios because of the difference in the habitat). Funding would also address administrative costs. Typical costs for the selected mitigation activity would be collected and averaged to develop a dollar per acre funding value. Idaho Power will restore temporarily disturbed areas; however, we recognize that there will be a time lag between restoration activities and establishment of vegetation. To account for temporal impacts associated with temporary impacts, Idaho Power will fund mitigation at a ratio of 0.5:1 (fund 0.5 acre of mitigation for every 1 acre of temporary impact) for direct impacts to PPH and PGH (or core, important, and general). For permanent impacts, Idaho Power will fund mitigation at a ratio of 2:1 for PPH (or core and important)

and 1:1 for PGH (or general); this will account for loss of habitat and meet BLM's requirement to maintain or enhance sage-grouse habitat.

In the event that an agreement cannot be reached with the BLM to fund restoration activities or that an in-lieu fee program is not established in Idaho, Idaho Power will implement mitigation in PPH and PGH areas adjacent to the proposed project. Mitigation would be implemented in areas that meet one or more of the following criteria:

- Areas within PPH or PGH that are currently not providing suitable sage-grouse habitat.
- In order of preference, Idaho Power and BLM would select mitigation sites in burned areas in PPH where rehabilitation is necessary; areas dominated by invasive annuals in PPH; areas dominated by invasive annuals in PGH that is adjacent to PPH; or areas that could provide key linkages between PPH and PGH.
- Areas that provide habitat for other special status species.
- Areas with a high likelihood of success. For example, areas with some sagebrush and/or native understory would be selected before areas that are comprised primarily of noxious weeds or invasive annuals.
- Areas with willing landowners and/or land management agencies.

Potential mitigation sites occur adjacent to the existing ROW (i.e., area burned by the Fir Grove Fire in 2013) and in PGH located south of U.S. Highway 26 and north of Idaho Highway 46. Idaho Power would evaluate these areas to determine existing conditions and the most appropriate methods for establishing desirable vegetation given the site conditions. Seeding would be implemented to promote re-establishment of vegetation.

Proposed mitigation is based on the BLM's IM 2012-043 that requires that the proposed ROW and mitigation measures would "...cumulatively maintain or enhance Greater Sage-Grouse habitat..." Because of the potential for new or changing mitigation requirements and implementation measures, the mitigation proposed in the March 2014 version of the Plan of Development may be changed so it is consistent with the BLM requirements at the time a ROW is granted and consistent with the impact analysis in the Environmental Assessment.

Preliminary Alternative Development

In 2007, IPC initiated and completed a cooperative planning effort with a Community Advisory Committee (CAC) to identify current and future electrical needs in the Wood River Valley and how to meet those needs Wood River Electrical Plan December 2007. The CAC identified several options to meet current and future community needs. The CAC initially recommended, and Idaho Power was going to pursue, construction of a new transmission line and substation. However, upon identification of the BLM's preliminary priority and general habitat (PPH and PGH) for greater sage-grouse and upon development of the State of Idaho's sage-grouse plan, Idaho Power determined that construction of a new line in a new right-of-way (through PPH and PGH) was not feasible. Idaho Power then evaluated rebuilding one of the existing 138-kV line to 230- kV and because of how the system operates, selected the King to Wood River line to rebuild.

Decision to be Made

The decision to be made is whether or not to permit the proposed amendment to the King to Wood River (Line 433) 138 Kilovolt Transmission Line grant (IDI-012961) to allow for the upgrading of the existing facilities, widening of the current right-of-way, and inclusion of access roads and, if permitted, what stipulations should be attached.

Public Input Needed

Comments are specifically requested on the proposed action, preliminary issues, and alternatives. Comments made on this proposal would be most helpful if they are received by April 8, 2014 and are directly relevant to the proposal and project area. The BLM will not reject public feedback outside established public involvement timeframes; however, these comments may be considered secondary to comments received in a timely manner and may only be assessed to determine if they identify concerns that would substantially alter the assumptions, proposal, design, or analysis presented in the EA. Comments sent electronically should be sent to blm_wo_king_woodriver@blm.gov with the title of this project in the subject line. Please identify whether you are submitting comments as an individual or as the designated spokesperson on behalf of an organization. Issues that are outside the scope of the proposal will not be addressed at this planning level.

The primary contact for questions and comments for this analysis is Dusty Parson, Realty Specialist/Idaho Power Right-of-Way Team Manager, 1387 S. Vinnell Way Boise, Idaho 83709 (208) 373-4068.