

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

**Finding of No Significant Impact
Idaho Power King to Wood River Transmission Line Rebuild
IDI-0-12961
DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2014-0007-EA**

Based upon the analysis of environmental impacts contained in the environmental assessment (EA), which is incorporated by reference (DOI-BLM-ID-T030-2014-0007-EA), and the supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed action (which is to reauthorize and amend the existing right-of-way (ROW) grant to Idaho Power Company (IPC) for a 138 kilovolt transmission line on public lands) is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects meet the definition of “significance” in context or intensity, as defined at 40 CFR § 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on my consideration of both the context and intensity of the project as described below.

Context. This means that the significance of an action must be analyzed in several contexts such as society as a whole (human, national), the affected region, the affected interests, and the locality. Significance varies with the setting of the proposed action. For instance, in the case of a site-specific action, significance would usually depend upon the effects in the locale rather than in the world as a whole. Both short- and long-term effects are relevant.

In relation to context, the transmission line has been in existence since 1962. It is approximately 59 miles long, extending from IPC’s King Substation, southwest of Gooding, Idaho, to the Wood River Substation, located near Ketchum, Idaho. The transmission line has existed for over 50 years and the landscape effects from the construction and operation of the linear facility have been largely realized. I find that the project’s affected region is localized and the effects of implementation are relevant to people recreating and living in Blaine, Camas, and Gooding Counties. There would be no significant societal or regional impacts and no significant impacts to potentially affected resources because the Proposed Action is a rebuild of a transmission line that was built in 1962, thus the landscape effects have been recognized and are localized.

Intensity. This refers to the severity of impact. Responsible officials must bear in mind that more than one agency may make decisions about partial aspects of a major action. The EA analyzed both beneficial and adverse impacts of the proposed project for various resources, including archaeological and historical resources, soils, biological resources, invasive plants, socioeconomics, visual resources, and water resources. Measures are incorporated into the Proposed Action to avoid, minimize, and then mitigate for adverse impacts to these resources. None of the environmental impacts discussed in detail in the Environmental Effects section of the EA are considered significant.

The CEQ regulations (40 CFR §1508.27) include the following ten considerations for evaluating intensity:

1. Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse

The effects of reauthorizing and amending the ROW would occur for the life of the ROW (30 years). The transmission line has been in existence since 1962 so many of the effects of the line have already been realized. The construction, operation, and maintenance impacts would occur within site-specific locations of the project area (e.g., tower foundation sites, pulling and tensioning sites, staging areas, and service roads). Ground disturbance during construction would result from road maintenance and creation, removal of existing structures and installation of new structures, pulling and tensioning sites, and staging yards. Of the approximately 120 acres of roads (including all road categories on public lands, and State and Private Lands) 34 acres would be impacted by the proposed action. The proposed action would create approximately 4.12 miles of new road on public lands. Up to 138 acres of total ground disturbance would be associated with the proposed action. Temporary construction sites would be stabilized and reseeded in areas affected by ground-disturbing activities. Less than an acre of permanent disturbance is associated with the poles themselves.

Reauthorizing the ROW and rebuilding the existing transmission line would allow for IPC to provide the residents of the Wood River Valley reliable electrical power. Due to the age of the line, rebuilding the line would prevent a high level of maintenance over the next several years on the current line.

2. Degree of effect on public health and safety

The decision to issue a ROW in itself does not affect public health and safety. The existing transmission line would be operated and maintained to meet or exceed the requirements of the National Electrical Safety Code, U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Standards, and IPC's requirements for safety and protection of landowners and their property. As a result, no adverse direct or indirect effects on human health and safety are expected.

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

Cultural surveys were completed for the existing ROW on BLM lands and an inventory of private lands, access roads, and temporary sites to be used during construction (outside existing ROW) was conducted as well. A total of 25 sites were recorded or rerecorded and of these 25 sites, ten are considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. There are no transmission structures located within any of these sites, and they are all spanned by the transmission line. This indicates only minimal impacts from the line to the site's setting, which have been in place for over 50 years. Existing access roads pass through four of these sites. These roads are the only project related impacts to the sites and are an existing condition. In consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, a determination of no adverse effect was reached for the sites that were identified to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The project would temporarily impact General, Important, and Priority Sage-Grouse Habitat Management Areas as described in section 4.4.4.5 of the EA. Impacts are temporary with the exception of the area occupied by the pole foundations and service roads. The impacts are categorized as temporary because the sites would be rehabilitated following construction.

The project would not impact park lands, prime farmlands, or wetlands. The project does not contain any Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, designated Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, or Wild & Scenic Rivers.

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

The proposed project will not affect the quality of the human environment or be highly controversial. Only three comment letters were received during the scoping period; none of the comments included in the letters were highly controversial. The comment letters were appropriately addressed in the EA. No significant individual or cumulative impacts are anticipated as a result of this action.

5. Degree to which the possible effects on the quality of the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risk

Effects from the proposed project are not considered highly uncertain, nor do they involve unknown risks. The proposed project is a rebuild of an existing transmission line, which has been in existence since 1962 so the effects of the line have already been realized.

6. 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 project is a rebuild of an existing transmission line. The ROW would be reauthorized for 30 years and amended to widen the ROW from 60 feet to 100 feet, authorize the replacement of the old structures, authorize existing and proposed service roads and issue a short term (3 year) ROW grant to allow for areas outside of the long-term ROW. This project is similar to many other projects approved by BLM responsible officials establishing ROW grants on public land, in accordance with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The Proposed Action is within the scope of the Bennett/Timmerman Hills Management Framework Plan (MFP) (1980), the Monument Resource Management Plan (1984), Sun Valley MFP (1981), and the Idaho and Southwestern Montana Greater Sage-Grouse Approved Resource Management Plan Amendment (ARMPA) (2015). The Proposed Action is a reauthorization; rebuild and amendment of an existing transmission line ROW and is not expected to set a precedent for future actions. Thus, the Proposed Action does not represent a decision in principle about a future consideration.

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

Cumulative effects are bounded by geographic and temporal scopes that can vary by resource. Geographic scope is generally based on natural boundaries and not jurisdictional boundaries. The temporal scope is generally based on the duration of effects of the Proposed Action or alternatives. The temporal scope considered for cumulative effects is 60 years for this analysis. This is based upon the 53 year age of the current powerline and estimating that the upgraded powerline would serve for the same amount of time and adding a seven year period for decommissioning.

The Proposed Action's addition of 4.12 miles of new service on BLM lands would cumulatively add to the overall road network that has been developed in the past and less than one acre of permanent ground disturbance is associated with the pole foundations themselves. The construction activities would cause

new temporary ground disturbance which would be rehabilitated after completion of construction and would represent a minor cumulative impact to the resources. This permanent and temporary disturbance associated with the proposed action would have minor cumulative impacts to archaeological and historical resources, soils, biological resources, invasive plants, socioeconomics, visual resources, and water resources. Implementation of the proposed project is not expected to result in significant cumulative impacts.

8. Degree to which the action may adversely affect district, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed on the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources

An intensive (Class III) survey was completed in 2011 for the existing ROW on BLM lands and an inventory of private lands, access roads, and temporary sites to be used during construction (outside existing ROW) was conducted in 2014. A total of 25 sites were recorded or rerecorded and of these 25 sites, ten are considered eligible to the National Register of Historic Places. There are no transmission structures located within any of these sites, and they are all spanned by the transmission line. This indicates only minimal impacts from the line to the site's setting, which have been in place for over 50 years. Existing access roads pass through four of these sites. These roads are the only project related impacts to the sites and are an existing condition. In consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, a determination of no adverse effect was reached for the sites that were identified to be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The EA identified no potential impacts to significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources (EA Section 4.1.1)

9. Degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its critical habitat

There are three species listed as Threatened in the project vicinity, based on the knowledge of existing conditions, lack of suitable habitat, and environmental protection measures to be taken, implementation of the selected action will have no effect on the species. There are no known plants listed as Threatened or Endangered within the project area.

10. Whether the action threatens a violation of federal, state, or local environmental protection law

The Proposed Action conforms to the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1502.13) and FLPMA (43 United States Code 1761- 1771) and is compliant with the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and Executive Orders 12898, 13007, 13212, 11988, and 11990.

/s/ Codie Martin

February 1, 2016

Codie Martin
Field Manager
Shoshone Field Office

Date