

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Ashley Valley Energy Route and invites you to express your interests, concerns and ideas during the scoping period that extends from May 12, 2014 to June 12, 2014.

The Ashley Valley Energy Route is a Uintah County right-of-way application to build a new roadway in a 300-foot wide right-of-way that would extend from US 40 at the McCoy Flat area, along 6500 South, to US 40 south of Naples (see the enclosed map and project description). The proposed route would cross approximately 3.16 miles of BLM-administered land, 5.2 miles of School and Institution Trust lands, and 3.9 miles of private land. This roadway would accommodate heavy commercial traffic volumes which are currently routed through downtown Vernal's Main Street, and which are expected to increase with the growth of the oil and gas industry.

In response to Uintah County's application for right-of-way across BLM lands, an EA will be prepared by the BLM to evaluate and disclose the potential project-related environmental impacts that could result from the Ashley Valley Energy Route. Based on the analysis in the EA, the BLM will issue a decision on whether or not to grant right-of-way on the lands the agency administers.

PROJECT TIMELINE

The anticipated timeline for the project is:

- Public Scoping period: May 12, 2014 until June 12, 2014;
- Public Scoping Meeting: May 29 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Vernal City Office Community Room
- Draft EA available for 30-day public review: fall 2014;
- Final EA and Decision Record issued: winter 2014/2015.

ACCESSING THE PROJECT WEBSITE

This project's website is located on the BLM NEPA Register. To access the site, go to:

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

Choose the "Advanced Search" hyperlink, and in the "Project Name" field type in "Ashley Valley Energy Route." Double click on the project website hyperlink.

HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE IN THE SCOPING PROCESS?

You can attend the Public Scoping Meeting: The public scoping meeting will be held on May 29, 2014 from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Vernal City Building Community Room. Representatives from the BLM and the proponent will be present during the meeting to talk face-to-face with members of the public, listen to any concerns, and answer questions about the project. The format of the meeting will be "open house" (come at any time, no formal presentation will be given, an open microphone will not be available).



You can comment during the Public Scoping Period: The public scoping period is being held so that members of the public can provide written comments on specific issues and concerns they have regarding the proposal. Written comments will help determine the issues to be addressed in the EA. All comments will be carefully reviewed and considered and become part of the official record.

Written comments must be submitted by June 12, 2014. “Please reference “Ashley Valley Energy Route” when submitting comments”. Comments can be submitted by any of the following methods:

- In person at the scoping meeting or the Vernal BLM Field Office
- U.S. Mail:
 - Vernal Field Office, BLM
 - ATTN: Stephanie Howard
 - 170 South 500 East
 - Vernal, Utah 84078
- E-mail: blm_ut_vernal_comments@blm.gov
- Project website:
https://www.blm.gov/epl-front-office/eplanning/nepa/nepa_register.do
To submit a comment on the project website, navigate to the site as described in the “Accessing the Project Website” section above, then click on the “Comment on Document” button.

Before including an address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in any comments, be aware that the entire comment—including personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. Requests to withhold personal identifying information from public review can be submitted, but the BLM cannot guarantee that it will be able to do so. The BLM will not consider anonymous comments. All submissions from organizations and businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, will be available for public inspection in their entirety.

ISSUES IDENTIFIED FOR ANALYSIS THUS FAR

The following environmental issues have already been identified for analysis. They include potential impacts on:

- Recreation resources, such as maintaining non-motorized access on the McCoy Flats trail system;
- Local social systems and economies such as temporary construction jobs, Main Street traffic congestion, local revenue impacts and zoning;
- Cultural resources, such as archeological and Native American concerns;
- Geology, minerals and energy production;
- Invasive plants, noxious weeds, soils and vegetation;
- Visual impacts, such as placement of billboards and information signs;
- Lands/access, such as impacts on existing BLM authorizations;
- Livestock grazing and rangeland health standards;
- Paleontological resources;
- BLM sensitive plants, such as Hamilton Milkvetch, Horseshoe Milkvetch, Sterile Yucca and Goodrich’s Penstemon;
- Sensitive animal species, such as Greater sage-grouse; and
- Wildlife and their habitats.

FUTURE PUBLIC PARTICIPATION OPPORTUNITIES

Additional opportunities for public review of the EA and input as to its adequacy will occur during the Draft EA public comment period. It is currently anticipated that the public comment period, and a public information open house, will occur in fall 2014.

SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The project consists of constructing a permanent new five-lane roadway south of Vernal Utah from US-40 southwest of Vernal to US-40 southeast of Vernal as shown on the attached map. The western terminus point on US 40 is at the Twelve Mile Wash Road turnoff and the eastern terminus point is at the Industrial Park in the Ashley Creek area. The right-of-way is within the following sections: T5S R20E Section 36, T5S R21 E Sections 31, 32, 33, 28, 27, 26, 25, 24 and T5S R22E Sections 30, 29, 28, 19, 21, 22, and 15. The roadway would serve as an east-west route south of Vernal and Naples, Utah, to be used year-round primarily for heavy truck traffic.

The project involves the construction of a new paved hot mix asphalt roadway with a 55 mph to 65 mph design speed. Existing dirt roads and some paved roads will be reconstructed as the alignment of the new roadway impacts them. The roadway will be 78 feet wide with widening as required to provide for guardrail if needed. The total length of the road is approximately 12.3 miles with approximately 3.16 miles crossing BLM land. The maximum grade for the road is 6 percent and the maximum pitch of the road is 6 percent. Side slopes will vary from 1:1 to 6:1 depending on the depth of the cut or fill and the type of existing material encountered.

A total right-of-way width of 250 feet is needed to address most of the slope catch points. A temporary construction easement of 25 feet on either side of the right-of-way is anticipated at this time. Temporary construction staging areas would be required by the contractor to stage his equipment and would be located within the 300 foot corridor.

The minimum anticipated annual average daily traffic volume on the roadway is 2,000 based on the roadway being constructed within the next few years. This volume is based on a traffic study performed in 2007. The traffic volumes have grown since then and are anticipated to increase each year by approximately 3 percent. It is anticipated that the traffic will continue to grow as the oil and gas industry grows. The projected traffic will be a mixture of passenger vehicles, service trucks and semi-trucks with the trucks carrying product, equipment and supplies to support the local community and industry. A traffic study updating the traffic projections will be completed as part of the NEPA process.

Maintenance and operation costs will be the responsibility of Uintah County. Maintenance will be chip seal or hot mix asphalt overlays, restriping, side slope grading, and culvert cleaning as needed. Operation will consist of patrolling the road for traffic violations, snow removal, and general cleaning.

A Class III Cultural Resources Inventory was conducted and the report submitted to the BLM. Two identified sites are eligible and recorded on the National Register of Historic Places. They are sites no. 42UN001562 Historic US Highway 40/Victory Highway and no. 42UN002676 Historic Highline Canal. Both run perpendicular to the proposed roadway and cannot be avoided. These crossings would be done in accordance to the Utah State Historic Preservation Office policies.

The majority of the McCoy Flats Mountain Bike Trail System including the trail head is located immediately north of the proposed route in the McCoy Flat area. The proposed roadway bisects two of the trails that are located on Utah School and Institutional Trust Lands administered lands. The proposed route was altered to minimize the impacts to the trails (a previous alignment intersected the trails nine times).

To mitigate direct and indirect impacts to Sage Grouse habitat, funding, not to exceed \$26,800.00, will be committed to enhance Sage Grouse habitat in Uintah County identified as part of Utah's Watershed Restoration Initiative: Project ID 2996 White Sage Slashing.

The road would be maintained and used indefinitely. However, in the event the roadway is abandoned, it would be obliterated and re-graded to blend in to the surrounding area and would be seeded with a BLM approved seed mixture.

PROPOSED ACTION MAP

