

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Proposed East-side Communication Facilities
DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2016-0023-EA

I have reviewed the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations (CEQ) for significance (40 CFR 1508.27) and have determined the actions analyzed in EA# DOI-BLM-ID-B010-2016-0023-EA would not constitute a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment; therefore, an Environmental Impact Statement will not be required. This finding was made through consideration of both the context and intensity of the potential effects of the action, as described in the above EA, using the following factors defining significance.

1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse.

Direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts for wildfire management, general vegetation, special status plants, wildlife, special status animals (including the Greater Sage Grouse), cultural resources, soils, air quality, military use, social and economic aspects were disclosed in Chapter 3 of the EA. Stipulations, design features, and monitoring and control intended to mitigate impacts to the various resources were incorporated in the action alternatives (EA, Chapter 3). This included mitigation for: potential bird collision or electrocution, potential disturbance of nesting birds, recordation of the removal of the 1960's era fire lookout and preservation of the South Mountain fire lookout, compensatory off-site restoration of greater sage grouse habitat, The analysis indicated no significant impacts, adverse or beneficial, on the affected resources.

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

The Proposed Action would have no appreciable effect on public health or safety. The analysis indicated that all facilities and equipment would be constructed/installed in accordance with all applicable Federal, state and local requirements, including the Motorola R56 standards (most recent edition) and National Electrical Safety Code. This minimizes general impacts to public health and safety. The new communication facilities will enable BOR to operate from its own secure location which will incrementally improve the reliability of its communications which are currently housed in 3rd party communication sites. Impacts to air quality associated with vehicle and ambient dust emissions associated with construction and reclamation activities within the project locations are minimal and fall well below the Environmental Protection Agencies reporting thresholds.

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.

The unique characteristic of the geography of these locations is instrumental in having a clear line-of-sight for a long distance. This is the reason the Bennett Mountain site was chosen both for the existing fire lookout, as well as for the proposed BOR Communication Site. The uniqueness of the Bennett Mountain peak will not be diminished by the removal of the existing lookout or from the

installation of a new communication tower. Historic resources do existing within close proximity to the area of potential effect and have been reviewed by BLM. The impacts to historic resources are limited to the removal of the Bennett Mountain Fire Lookout. Consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office has been completed regarding the removal of the fire lookout at this location. The removal of the lookout will be mitigated through the provisions in the executed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) serialized as BLM-BDO-ID-2016-03. Those provisions include intensive level documentation of the Bennett Mountain Fire Lookout. The provisions also include intensive level documentation of the South Mountain Fire Lookout as well as preservation of the characteristics of the South Mountain Fire Lookout. In addition to the aforementioned provisions, the BLM will develop an interpretive element to be placed near the South Mountain Lookout as well as an article that will be published on a BLM website.

There are no wetlands, park lands, prime farmlands, wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, or ecologically critical areas associated with the proposed rights-of-way (ROW). No other unique characteristics exist within the area of potential impact.

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

BLM manages the multiple uses of public lands. Within those multiple uses of the public land, BLM regularly authorizes rights-of-way for communication purposes. The authorization of these communication site ROW grants would have negligible impact on the human environment and is uncontroversial. The ROW would be located within areas where other communication towers and equipment infrastructure exists. The EA also assessed the context and intensity of the additional disturbance involved with the project and found that it would be consistent with existing, known activities and levels of use in these areas. Historic use of the area for communication use is in line with BLM's management prescription of these areas and no issues have been raised by the public related to controversy over the effects of the proposed additional use or associated impacts.

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

The analysis identified no effects on the human environment which would be highly uncertain or involve unknown risks as a result of this action. The proposed ROW would all be located within areas that currently have existing communication uses that have been ongoing for many decades. The EA assessed the type, intensity, and amount of impacts from the additional use of these communication sites and determined that they would be conducted within industry standard practices and involve no uncertainties or risks that are unique or unknown. The BLM also assessed the need to mitigate impacts related to 0.23 acres of additional disturbance in Greater Sage Grouse general habitat. These communication use activities have been ongoing within the area at levels consistent with industry standard practices. Therefore, the effects on the human environment are not considered to be highly uncertain or involve unique 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 action would conform to all federal law, regulations, and policy and the BLM regularly evaluates pertaining to rights-of-way across public lands. The communication use on public land is available per federal regulations found at 43 CFR 2806. As described in the EA, the action is consistent with decisions and direction established in the multiple Resource Management Plans. Issuance of these ROW would be consistent with historic uses of the area and would not establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects or represent a decision principle.

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

The EA evaluated the potential cumulative impacts of the Proposed Action. This Action analyzed cumulative effects included: visual resources, cultural resources, socio-economics, vegetation, wildlife, and special status species. Due to lack of impacts, no cumulative significant effects are anticipated on this resource as a result of the proposed project.

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 or cultural resources.***

Historic resources do exist within close proximity to the area of potential effect on Bennett Mountain. The historic structure of the Bennett Mountain Fire Lookout has been thoroughly reviewed by BLM. The removal of the Bennett Mountain Fire Lookout would permanently impact this structure. Due to the impacts associated with removing this lookout, BLM has consulted with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office. Through this consultation the removal of the lookout has been agreed to be mitigated through the provisions in the executed Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) serialized as BLM-BDO-ID-2016-03. Those provisions include intensive level documentation of both the Bennett Mountain Fire Lookout. The provisions also include intensive level documentation of the South Mountain Fire Lookout as well as preservation of the characteristics of the South Mountain Fire Lookout. In addition to the aforementioned provisions, the BLM will develop an interpretive element to be placed near the South Mountain Lookout as well as an article that will be published on a BLM website. Due to the intense level of documentation along with preservation efforts and interpretive elements, it has been determined that there will be no significant loss to the recordation of this historical structure.

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

Both the USFWS and the BLM Type 1 Special Status Species Category lists for the Assessment Area include the Federally threatened yellow-billed cuckoo, indicated to be present within the Idaho counties (Elmore and Lincoln) in which both project sites included in the Assessment Area are located. The Type 1 ESA list for occurrence in Elmore County (where the Bennett Mountain site is located) also includes bull trout, Bliss Rapids snail, Snake River physa snail, slickspot peppergrass, and whitebark pine; however, upon closer examination related to each of these species' ranges, none

were identified by BLM specialists as existing within or near the Assessment Area at either the Bennett Mountain or Notch Butte project sites, and therefore no adverse effects are anticipated to these species.

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

The proposed action was developed in accordance with all applicable Federal, Tribal, State, and local laws for the protection of the environment. The EA disclosed that the proposed ROW would comply with all known Federal, Tribal, State, and local law and requirements imposed for the protection of the environment and are consistent with applicable land management plan, policies, and programs.

/s/ Tate Fischer
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6/7/16
Date

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