



# United States Department of the Interior



## BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT SOUTHWEST DISTRICT OFFICE

2465 South Townsend  
Montrose, CO 81401

[www.blm.gov/co/st/en/district\\_offices/southwest.html](http://www.blm.gov/co/st/en/district_offices/southwest.html)

In Reply Refer To:  
2800 (COS000)  
COC-66840

**MAY 05 2014**

Dear Interested Party,

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Southwest District Office, Colorado is seeking public input regarding a proposal by Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association (Tri-State) to upgrade an existing transmission line system across private, state, and federal lands in southwestern Colorado. Tri-State is proposing to upgrade and rebuild the existing Montrose-Nucla-Cahone transmission line from 115 kilovolts (kV) to 230 kV. (See Enclosure 1: Proposed Project Map.) The transmission line supports Tri-State's Western Slope members, including three electric associations. Proposed upgrades would improve the overall performance of the region's electrical grid.

The Tri-State Montrose-Nucla-Cahone Transmission Improvement Project (Project) area includes approximately 59 linear miles of public land in the BLM Uncompahgre and Tres Rios field offices and approximately 46 linear miles of public land in the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) and San Juan national forests. An additional 20 miles of line cross lands managed by the State of Colorado or private landowners. The BLM and the U.S. Forest Service (FS) have each determined that there is a need to analyze and respond to Tri-State's application in a timely manner and identify any permit conditions necessary for resource protection and public safety.

Tri-State has applied for a Right-of-Way (ROW) grant amendment to an existing BLM ROW grant. If approved, the transmission line would be rebuilt to 230 kV using primarily wooden H-frame structures and some self-supporting steel structures. The H-frame structures would be approximately 25 feet taller and 10 feet wider than the existing structures. Additionally, the 115-kV poles would be removed during the construction process.

Tri-State's rebuild proposal would make use of an existing 100-foot wide ROW to the greatest extent possible. The new 230-kV transmission line would require an additional 50 feet of ROW for a total of 150 feet. The rebuild would consist of the following components:

- A 230-kV transmission line from the existing Montrose Substation west of Montrose, Colorado to a new Nucla 230-kV Substation.
- A 230-kV transmission line from the new Nucla 230-kV Substation to the existing Cahone Substation near Dove Creek, Colorado.

- Double circuit structures between the new Nucla 230-kV Substation and the existing Nucla 115-kV Substation at the Nucla Power Plant. The double circuit would consist of the existing Sunshine-Nucla 115-kV line and the new 230-kV Nucla to Cahone transmission line.
- A new substation near the existing Nucla Substation and power plant, near Nucla, Colorado. The new substation would be called the Nucla 230-kV Substation.
- Expansion and equipment additions to the existing Montrose Substation (on Tri-State property) to accommodate the new 230-kV circuit.
- Expansion and equipment additions to the existing Cahone Substation (on Tri-State property) to accommodate the new 230-kV circuit.
- A possible deviation from the existing route of the transmission line at the crossing of the Dolores River Canyon.

If approved, Tri-State plans to construct the Project in two segments and time periods, beginning with construction of the Nucla Substation and Nucla to Cahone segment in 2017, followed by the Nucla to Montrose segment in 2018. In 2016, a network of existing access routes used to maintain the 115-kV transmission line would be improved upon as needed for use in constructing and maintaining the 230-kV transmission line. Additional spur routes might also be required.

As the designated Lead Federal Agency, the BLM Southwest District Office has determined that an Environmental Assessment (EA) is required before the agencies (BLM and FS) can render decisions on the proposed Project. The EA must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969 as amended, the Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970, and all other applicable laws, Executive Orders, regulations, and direction. Based on the NEPA analysis, the BLM will decide whether to 1) approve the requested ROW amendment, 2) not approve the ROW, or 3) approve the ROW with modifications.

The FS is serving as a Cooperating Agency for the proposed project, with primary responsibility to issue special use authorizations for ROWs on National Forest System Lands under the Federal Land Policy Management Act of 1976 as amended. Based on joint analysis, the FS will render a decision regarding whether to issue a special use permit for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the 230-kV line across lands administered by the FS in the GMUG and San Juan national forests. In addition, the FS will identify conditions to include in the Construction Stipulations and in the Operation and Maintenance plan. GMUG Forest Supervisor Scott G. Armentrout is the responsible official for the FS decision and for authorizing any permits associated with the project.

The BLM has also invited the Rural Utilities Service and a number of tribal, federal, state and local agencies to serve as cooperating agencies with the BLM on this project.

### **Opportunity to Comment**

Comments received will be used to help the Interagency Interdisciplinary Team identify issues and refine the proposed action, develop measures to mitigate potential negative effects, and develop alternatives to the proposed action that meet the purpose and need and address key issues. Comment periods will be conducted jointly between the agencies, with the BLM serving as the lead agency. Each agency will be subject to its respective regulations for BLM appeals (43

CFR 3279) and FS pre-decisional objections (36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B). There will be two 30-day comment periods during this process (including the current period and a second period that will commence with the release of the preliminary EA). Submitting comments during either of these comment periods will establish standing for BLM appeals (43 CFR 3279) and FS objections (36 CFR Subpart B 218.24).

In order to meet the FS requirement for objection eligibility on “specific written comments” (36 CFR Subpart A 218.2), your comments must be 1) within the scope of the proposed action, 2) have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and 3) must include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider. To establish standing for the FS 218 objection process, all specific written comments (36 CFR Subpart B 218.25) must be postmarked within 30 days from publication of the legal notice in the *Grand Junction Daily Sentinel* and *Durango Herald* or by close of business on June 4, 2014, whichever is later.

Your comments should include: 1) your name and postal address, 2) the project title (Tri-State MNC), and 3) your signature or other verification of identity upon request. Comments received from individual members of an organized group through a clearinghouse or group-generated mail will be considered as the views of the group (pursuant to 36 CFR Subpart B 218.25(a)(3)(v)).

Written comments should be submitted by June 4, 2014 to the BLM Southwest District, Attn: Tri-State Project, 2465 S. Townsend Ave., Montrose, CO 81401, by email to [blm\\_co\\_tristatemnc@blm.gov](mailto:blm_co_tristatemnc@blm.gov), or by fax to (970) 240-5367.

Please be advised that your entire comment, including your personally identifiable information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can request that your personally identifiable information be withheld from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

For more information, go to the BLM Tri-State Project website at <http://blm.gov/dvld> or contact Gina Jones, BLM NEPA Coordinator by phone at (970) 882-6829 or by email to [gmjones@blm.gov](mailto:gmjones@blm.gov). Additional information about the USFS objection process can be obtained by contacting Liz Mauch by phone at (970) 240-5405 or by email to [lmauch@fs.fed.us](mailto:lmauch@fs.fed.us).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Armstrong', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Lori Armstrong  
District Manager, BLM Southwest District

Enclosure (1)  
1. Project Map