



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
SOUTHWEST DISTRICT OFFICE
2465 South Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401

www.blm.gov/co/st/en/district_offices/southwest.html



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

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is a copy of the Preliminary Environmental Assessment (EA) titled “Tri-State Montrose-Nucla-Cahone (MNC) Transmission Line Improvement Project.” This EA has been prepared to disclose and analyze the environmental effects of the Tri-State Montrose-Nucla-Cahone Transmission Line Improvement Project proposed by Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. (Tri-State).

Project Background

Tri-State submitted an application to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) for authorizations to rebuild the existing Montrose-Nucla-Cahone 115-kV transmission line to a 230-kV transmission line, and to operate and maintain the new 230-kV transmission line and optical ground wire. The transmission line is located in Dolores, San Miguel, Montrose and Ouray Counties, in Colorado.

If approved, Tri-State would use primarily wooden H-frame structures which would be approximately 25 feet taller and 10 feet wider than the existing structures. Tri-State proposes to use the existing 115-kV 100-foot right-of-way (ROW) for the rebuild to the greatest extent possible. The new 230-kV transmission line would require an additional 50 foot of ROW clearing for a total of 150 foot- wide ROW. Tri-State would primarily use approximately 241 miles of roads not including state highways, currently used for the existing line. About 67 miles of these roads are down line access located under the existing MNC line. Approximately 6 miles of new access/spur roads would be needed. Tri-State’s proposed action also includes upgrades to the existing Cahone and Montrose substations and a new substation near Nucla, Colorado.

Details of the proposed project are presented in Tri-State’s draft Plan of Development (Appendix D of the EA). The Final Plan of Development would reflect the terms and condition for mitigation, construction, maintenance, and reclamation stipulated in the agencies’ decision documents, should the agencies approve an Action Alternative.

The EA analyzes Tri-State’s Proposed Action, the No Action Alternative, and three combinations of BLM routing options. There are a total of four combinations of Action Alternatives that are possible for the project.

- Alternative A, Tri-State’s Proposed Action: Upgrade-in-place with realignments at the Dolores River crossing and near the Cahone substation.
- Alternative B, No Action: In the No Action Alternative, the existing MNC 115-kV transmission line associated access roads would remain and the transmission line would not be improved.
- Alternative C, BLM Routing Options:
 - Dolores River Crossing Routing Option: Alternative A incorporating an upgrade-in-place variation at Dolores River crossing;
 - Dry Creek Basin Routing Option: Alternative A incorporating a realignment parallel to State Highway 141 in Dry Creek Basin;
 - Both Routing Options: Alternative A incorporating the upgrade-in-place variation at Dolores River crossing and the realignment in Dry Creek Basin.

After consideration of public comment on the Preliminary EA, the BLM will identify the agency preferred alternative in the Final EA. The identification of a preferred alternative would not constitute a commitment or decision in principle. The BLM's decision on the proposed project would be documented in a Decision Record following publication of the Final EA. The USFS would issue a Decision Notice.

Preliminary EA and Opportunity to Comment

The EA has been prepared in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976. The BLM is the lead federal agency for the NEPA process and the USFS is a cooperating agency. There are other cooperating agencies participating in the EA process, including San Miguel, Dolores, Montrose Counties and the Colorado Energy Office.

An EA provides analysis for determining whether to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement or a statement of "Finding of No Significant Impact" (FONSI). If no significant impacts, as defined in 40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1508.27, are identified, a BLM Decision Record and a USFS Decision Notice would be signed describing the decision on whether to deny the proposed project, approve the project as proposed, or approve the project with modifications.

The BLM and USFS welcome your comments. Comment periods are being conducted jointly between the BLM and USFS. Comments will be accepted for 30 days following publication of the Preliminary EA on the BLM project website, address below. Substantive comments and information submitted will be summarized and addressed in the Final EA. Substantive comments are those that, with reasonable basis, question the accuracy of, methodology for, or assumptions used in the environmental analysis; present new information relevant to the analysis; present reasonable alternatives other than those analyzed; and/or changes or revisions in one or more alternatives. All timely comments will be considered, but the BLM can best use your comments and information if received **by December 3, 2015**.

Those individuals wishing to submit comments are asked to do so in writing and submit them to;

- By email to: blm_co_tristatemnc@blm.gov
- By mail to: BLM Southwest District
Attn: Gina Jones
2465 S. Townsend Avenue
Montrose, CO 81401
- By fax: (970) 240-5367

Your comments should include: 1) your name and postal address, 2) the project title (Tri-State Project), 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)).

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.

Appeals and Objections

Each agency will be subject to its respective regulations for BLM appeals (43 CFR Part 4) and USFS pre-decisional objections (36 CFR 218 Subparts A and B). This is the second of two 30-day comment periods during this process that establish standing to appeal or to object. Submitting comments during either of these comment periods will establish standing for BLM appeals and USFS objections.

In order to meet the USFS requirement for objection eligibility on "specific written comments" you must have submitted comments during public scoping (held May 5 through June 4, 2014) or on this draft analysis. 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 USFS 218 objection process, all specific written comments 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 **December 3, 2015**, whichever is latest.

For Further Information

The BLM will host a meeting on November 16, 2015 (5-7 pm) at Dove Creek High School located at 525 North Main Street, Dove Creek, Colorado to provide an overview of the proposed Project. Further information is available on the project website at <http://blm.gov/dvld>.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Southwest District NEPA Coordinator Gina Jones by phone at 970-240-5381, or by email at 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.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara Sharrow". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barb Sharrow
Southwest District Manager, Acting