

Scoping Summary Report

for the
Chokecherry and Sierra Madre
Wind Energy Project
Environmental Impact Statement



Prepared for:



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Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project Environmental Impact Statement Scoping Summary Report

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1.0 Introduction

Two primary principles of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) are full disclosure of potential environmental effects and open public participation throughout the decision-making process. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project in southern Wyoming. The BLM is the lead agency and cooperating agencies currently are being identified. The Scoping Summary Report provides an overview of the public scoping process and a summary of the scoping comments and the issues and concerns identified during the scoping process.

1.1 Description of the Proposed Project

The Wyoming Power Company of Wyoming, LLC, an affiliate of the Anschutz Company, proposes to construct a wind energy project near Rawlins in Carbon County, Wyoming. The Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project comprises approximately 98,500 acres on private, state, and federal lands. Approximately 675 2-megawatt (MW) turbines are proposed for construction in the Chokecherry portion of the project area; approximately 325 2-MW turbines would be constructed on the Sierra Madre portion of the project area. Combined, both project areas would generate approximately 2,000 MW of power to the electric grid. Additional facilities associated with the proposed project include a network of access roads, underground electrical collection lines, an overhead electric transmission line, and electrical substations.

1.2 Purpose of Scoping

Scoping is the process of actively soliciting input from the public and other interested federal, state, tribal, and local agencies. Information gained during scoping assists BLM in identifying potential environmental issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures associated with development of the proposed Project. The process provides a mechanism for determining the scope and the significant issues (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1501.7 and 40 CFR 1508.25) so that the EIS can focus the analyses on areas of interest and concern. Therefore, public participation during the scoping period is a vital component to preparing a comprehensive and sound NEPA document. Scoping provides the public, tribes, and agencies opportunities for meaningful public involvement in the decision-making process.

BLM's overall scoping goal for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project is to engage a diverse group of public and agency participants in the NEPA process, solicit relevant input, and provide timely information throughout the duration of the project. Six specific key goals were established in the project's Public Participation Plan and are provided below:

- Develop a consistent, meaningful, and coordinated approach to external and internal communication themes and outreach strategies.
- Educate the public and key stakeholders about wind power generation and the proposed wind energy project.
- Increase public awareness and understanding of the NEPA process.
- Identify the public's concerns so they can be addressed in the EIS.
- Effectively communicate, cooperate, and consult with Native American tribes, federal and state agencies, and local elected and appointed officials.
- Evaluate the success of the communications and public participation activities to identify whether additional outreach activities are needed.

2.0 Summary of Scoping Meetings and Comments

2.1 Notification

The initial step in the NEPA process is to notify the public, other government agencies, and tribes of the lead agency's intent to prepare an EIS by publishing the Notice of Intent (NOI) in the *Federal Register*. The NOI for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project was published in the *Federal Register* on July 25, 2008, and included a project description and BLM contact information. Additionally, scoping letters were mailed on July 25, 2008, to over 600 interested parties including federal, state, and local agencies and tribes. The letters included a description of the proposed project, the scoping statement, and a project location map. **Appendix A** lists the federal, state, and local agencies that were notified. Additionally, the BLM prepared and issued a press release on July 18, 2008, announcing publication of the NOI and the initiation of the public scoping period.

Display advertisements were placed in local newspapers (**Table 1**) providing information about the upcoming public scoping meeting dates, times, and locations.

Table 1 Newspaper Publications

Newspaper	Dates Published
<i>Casper Star Tribune</i>	July 30, August 6, August 10, 2008
<i>Rawlins Daily Times</i>	July 31, August 6, August 9, August 13, 2008
<i>Saratoga Sun</i>	August 6, August 13, 2008

As part of the notification process, the BLM distributed "storefront" flyers to community centers and local businesses in Rawlins, Sinclair, Saratoga, and Baggs, Wyoming announcing the public scoping meetings.

In addition to the scoping notification, agencies were sent a letter notification on August 18, 2008, about an interested agency meeting scheduled for September 15, 2008. A follow up reminder postcard about the meeting was mailed to agencies on September 3, 2008.

The BLM extended the 45-day scoping period to September 23, 2008. Postcards were mailed on September 4, 2008, to interested parties and agencies announcing the scoping period extension. The extended scoping period allowed more time for interested parties to participate and provide their input and comments about the proposed project.

2.1.1 Consultation and Coordination with Federal, State, and Local Governments

Specific regulations require BLM to coordinate and consult with federal, state, and local agencies about the potential of the proposed project and alternatives to affect sensitive resources. The coordination and consultation must occur in a timely manner and are required before any final decisions are made. Issues related to agency consultation may include biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomics, and land and water management. Biological resource consultations apply to the potential for activities to disturb sensitive species or habitats. Cultural resource consultations apply to the potential for impacts to important cultural or archaeological sites. The BLM has initiated these coordination and consultation activities through the scoping process. To-date the following agencies will be participating as a cooperating agency on the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project EIS:

- State of Wyoming;
- United States Forest Service Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests Thunder Basin National Grasslands;
- Little Snake River Conservation District;
- Saratoga/Encampment Conservation District;
- Northern Cheyenne Tribe; and
- Carbon County Commissioners.

2.1.2 Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation

Under Executive Order 13084, BLM is required to establish regular and meaningful consultation and collaboration with Native American tribal governments on development of regulatory policies and issuance of permits that could significantly or uniquely affect their communities. On July 25, 2008, the BLM distributed letters to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Eastern Shoshone Tribe, Northern Arapaho Tribe, and the Northern Ute Tribe offering them cooperating agency status. Formal consultation under section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, has not yet been initiated.

2.2 Scoping Meetings

Public Scoping Meetings

Public scoping meetings offer an opportunity for public involvement during the scoping period. The meetings are designed to promote information exchange about the proposed Project and to gather public input. BLM hosted four public scoping meetings: two in Rawlins, one each in Saratoga and Baggs, Wyoming. The dates, locations, and number of public attendees at the scoping meetings are provided in **Table 2**.

Table 2 Scoping Meetings

Meeting Location	Meeting Date/Time	Number of Attendees that Signed In
Saratoga, Wyoming	August 16/9:30 – 12 noon	20
Rawlins, Wyoming	August 16/3 – 6 pm	12
Rawlins, Wyoming	August 18/5 – 8 pm	44
Baggs, Wyoming	August 19/5 – 8 pm	4

The scoping meetings were conducted as an informal open house format to allow for an open exchange of information and ability of attendees to ask agency personnel, the project applicant, and EIS contractor questions about the project. Display boards showing various aspects (e.g., project location, Visual Resource Management Areas, Special Management Areas, biological resources, the NEPA process) of the proposed project were presented to facilitate conversation. Three display boards depicted before and after photo simulations of the project from various key observation locations. Additionally, a GoogleEarth™ video simulation provided an overall project view of the wind energy project. A looped video showing the sequential process of turbine and tower construction and erection also was presented. Display boards and informational materials presented to the public at the scoping meetings are provided in **Appendix B**.

Interested Agency Meeting

The BLM held an interested agency meeting on Monday, September 15, at 1:00 pm in the BLM Rawlins Field Office. An open house was conducted prior to the formal presentations. Meeting materials used for the public scoping meetings were available, including the board displays, the GoogleEarth™ video simulation, the looped video showing wind farm construction, and project fact sheets. The open house allowed for information exchange among agency representatives, the BLM, and project applicant. Following the open house, the BLM introduced the project and EIS participants. The project proponent presented the project and responded to questions from agency attendees. Twenty-two interested agency personnel participated in the interested agency meeting including representatives from the Wyoming Game and Fish, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the State Historic Preservation Office, and Carbon County.

2.3 Summary of Scoping Comments

BLM received a total of 47 comment submittals (e.g., letter, comment form, email) containing 411 individual comments during the public scoping period. Most of the comments BLM received were from agencies and nongovernmental organizations.

Following the close of the public scoping period, comments were compiled and analyzed to identify issues and concerns. Each comment was identified, reviewed, and entered into an electronic database. As comments were entered, contact information for the commenter was added, or updated, to the mailing list to ensure that all interested parties would receive information throughout the EIS process.

Once the individual comments were compiled in the database, reports were generated categorizing the issues by topic (e.g., NEPA process, alternatives, cumulative impacts, etc.) and/or resource (e.g., biology, soils, visual, etc.). The summary reports were reviewed to identify data entry errors and eliminate duplication. A comprehensive list of scoping comments was sorted by topic and is presented in **Appendix C**. Some of the scoping comments were eliminated from consideration in the EIS because they addressed issues outside of the scope of detailed analyses or the comment stated an opinion (e.g., I oppose/support this project).

3.0 Identification of Issues

Information gained during scoping assists BLM in identifying the potential environmental issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures associated with development of the proposed project. As previously discussed, the process provides a mechanism for narrowing the scope of issues so that the EIS can focus the analysis on areas of high interest and concern. A majority of the comments were related to impacts associated with project development to biological resources, visual resources, recreation, and processes for siting project components (including wind turbines and transmission lines) to avoid impacts to these resources. The following summarizes the key concerns expressed during scoping.

Biological Resources

- Impacts associated with sage grouse and sage grouse habitat.
- Project impacts to big game (mule deer, elk, and antelope) migration patterns.
- Turbines should be sited to avoid impacts to avian species (passerines, raptors, mountain plover, golden eagle, and BLM Sensitive Species) and bats (specifically the hoary and silver-haired bats).
- Impacts to other wildlife species such as the pygmy rabbit and prairie dog towns which support the burrowing owl, black-footed ferret, and kit fox.

- Concern about aquatic species and impacts to fisheries from construction sediment runoff into nearby streams and rivers.
- Suggestion to adopt adaptive management protocols to reduce impact to wildlife and habitat.
- Project development should avoid Special Wildlife Management Areas.
- The EIS should establish standards for protection of native plant communities and rare or special state plant species within the project area.

Cultural Resources

- Several comments regarding impacts, including visual impacts to historic trails, such as the Overland Trail.
- A comprehensive monitoring and cultural resource discovery plan should be developed that includes training for construction workers.

Visual Resources

- Rawlins residents expressed concern about the project's impacts to existing views.
- Commenters suggested project siting and mitigation should be applied to meet management objectives of a Visual Resource Management Class III; they suggested an amendment to the Rawlins Resource Management Plan should not be pursued.

Grazing/Rangeland

- Consideration to the loss of palatable forage and the effects on livestock and animal unit months as a result of project development.
- Concern expressed about increased off- and on-traffic from project development and impacts to livestock.

Recreation

- Several concerns expressed about project impacts to the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.

Land Use

- The EIS should evaluate the effects of reduced access to public lands for recreation and mineral resources.
- Concern about project impacts to the Wyoming Fish and Game easements along the North Platte River from road upgrades.

Additional key concerns were related to the cumulative impacts analysis, mitigation and reclamation of project access roads, project construction impacts to water quality and resources, and construction impacts to air quality. Impacts to recreational hunting and economic impact to the region's tourism were other concerns brought forward during the scoping period.

4.0 Potential Alternatives

One of the objectives of scoping is to identify alternatives or options to the applicant's proposed project for evaluation in the EIS. The first is to identify potential alternatives, then to screen out alternative or options that do not meet the project's purpose and need. Potential alternatives are then narrowed down to options that are

“feasible” and “reasonable” based on technical, economic, and environmental factors. Alternatives or options that were eliminated from detailed evaluation will be discussed in the EIS including the reasons for elimination.

BLM will review alternatives identified during the scoping period. These comments and issues will be used to develop an array of potential alternatives for consideration by the BLM.

Below is a summary of key public comments associated with alternatives to the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project.

- The alternatives analysis should consider alternative sites such as the reclaimed mine land near Hanna, Wyoming.
- All reasonable alternatives should be evaluated to prevent impacts to sage grouse as well as to reduce impacts to the existing landscape.
- Alternatives to siting turbines to meet management objectives of Visual Resource Management Class III areas should be evaluated.
- The alternatives analysis should consider transmission line options such as locating transmission lines with existing lines; upgrading existing lines; and burying transmission lines, particularly through open spaces.

5.0 Activities Following Scoping

The NEPA process provides numerous opportunities for public input. Following the scoping period, the Draft EIS will be prepared incorporating information received from the public during the scoping period. Once the Draft EIS is complete, BLM will publish and distribute the document for public review. During the review period, the public can comment on key issues and the adequacy of the purpose and need, alternatives analysis, and proposed mitigation presented in the Draft EIS. Public hearing(s) will take place to allow other public to formally present their comments. The comments will be recorded by a court reporter. **Table 3** identifies additional opportunities and the anticipated schedule for the public to provide comments and participate in the EIS environmental review process.

Table 3 Opportunities for Participation in the NEPA Process

Steps in the Process	Anticipated Date
Publication of the Draft EIS	Spring – Summer 2009
Draft EIS Public Hearings	Spring – Summer 2009
Close of Public Review Period	Summer 2009
Publication of the Final EIS	Winter 2009/2010