

Scoping Summary Report

Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project

Environmental Assessment for Infrastructure Components

**Phase I Haul Road and Facilities, West Sinclair Rail Facility, and Road
Rock Quarry**

High Desert District – Rawlins Field Office

January 2014



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**Phase I Haul Road and Facilities, West Sinclair Rail Facility, and Road
Rock Quarry, Carbon County, Wyoming**

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

BLM	Bureau of Land Management
CCSM	Chokecherry and Sierra Madre
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CFR	Code of Federal Regulations
CO ₂	carbon dioxide
EA	Environmental Assessment
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
FONSI	Finding of No Significant Impact
KOP	key observation point
MW	megawatts
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act
NRHP	National Register of Historic Places
PCW	Power Company of Wyoming
ROD	Record of Decision
U.S.C.	United States Code

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, Power Company of Wyoming LLC (PCW) applied to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for right-of-way grants to construct, operate, maintain and decommission the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre (CCSM) Wind Energy Project on federal lands within the CCSM Project Site. On June 29, 2012, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the CCSM Project was issued, and on October 9, 2012, the Record of Decision (ROD) was signed. In the ROD, the BLM determined that more than 200,000 acres within the CCSM Project Site are suitable for wind energy development subject to the requirements described under the Selected Alternative. Subsequent tiered environmental assessments (EAs) are needed to analyze site-specific issues. The first to be analyzed is an infrastructure component EA which includes the Phase I Haul Road and Facilities, West Sinclair Rail Facility, and Road Rock Quarry.

Scoping is part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review process. During scoping, federal agencies solicit comments and information from the public, agencies, and tribes. The BLM conducted two scoping meetings and posted the meeting materials on their website to provide opportunities for the public to learn more about the project, provide comments, and identify potential issues. The BLM hosted two cooperating agency meetings on the same days as the public scoping meetings. This Scoping Summary Report provides an overview of the scoping process and a summary of the scoping comments and the issues and concerns identified during the scoping process.

1.1 DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED PROJECT

PCW proposes to construct, operate, maintain, and decommission the CCSM Project, located in Carbon County, Wyoming. The CCSM Project consists of up to 1,000 wind turbines capable of generating approximately 2,000 to 3,000 megawatts (MW) of clean, renewable wind energy. The CCSM Project has a proposed life of 30 years after which, subject to market conditions, the CCSM Project may be repowered as necessary to continue its operations. The CCSM Project will provide enough electricity to power more than 790,000 households, resulting in a reduction in carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions of 7 to 11 million tons per year.

The infrastructure component EA includes the Phase I Haul Road and Facilities, West Sinclair Rail Facility, and Road Rock Quarry, described below.

Phase I Haul Road and Facilities. The Phase I Haul Road and Facilities include the CCSM Project Haul Road (32 miles), certain arterial and facility access roads (25 miles), as well as three water stations, one water extraction facility, and five laydown yards. The internal Haul Road begins at the northern project entrance where it connects to CIG Road (County Road 407), the Haul Road then travels west connecting to the West Sinclair Rail Facility, and finally travels south through the center of the Chokecherry wind development area into Sage Creek Basin and the Sierra Madre wind development area.

West Sinclair Rail Facility. The West Sinclair Rail Facility consists of a rail connection to the Union Pacific Railroad mainline between Rawlins and Sinclair and associated laydown yards to receive, temporarily stage, and deliver components and construction-related materials. The West Sinclair Rail Facility connects with the internal CCSM Project Haul Road and is designed to minimize impacts to public roadways, provide more cost effective transportation, and promote efficient project construction activities. The 14 miles of track feature a wye, a lead track, a running track, a loop track, and several unloading areas. Vehicle access to the facility is from Interstate 80, Exit 221, and the CCSM Project internal Haul Road.

Road Rock Quarry. Located at the site of an existing quarry, approximately two miles south of Rawlins, the Road Rock Quarry would provide road construction material for the CCSM Project. The quarry would improve the efficiency of the project by decreasing the number of train and truck trips from off-site quarries necessary for road base aggregate. The Road Rock Quarry would be accessed by crossing federal lands under the administration of the BLM Rawlins Field Office. Activities at the quarry would involve surface rock mining and processing of sandstones and shales. The quarry, proposed to be approximately 120 acres, includes the excavation area, material processing area, material storage piles, operations area, and the Quarry Road (five miles). The quarry was not included in the CCSM Project EIS.

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. The BLM follows the public involvement requirements according to the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations set forth in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1501.7, which states, “there should be an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed during the planning process.” During the scoping process, the BLM solicits comments from the public and relevant agencies, organizes and analyzes all of the comments received, and then distills the comments to identify the issues to be addressed during the planning process. The BLM and cooperating agencies consider comments provided during scoping and refine the issues and planning criteria, formulate alternatives, and conduct impact analyses. 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.

CHAPTER 2. SUMMARY OF SCOPING MEETINGS AND COMMENTS

2.1 NOTIFICATION

Scoping for the infrastructure component EA began on September 9, 2013 when the BLM prepared and issued a press release announcing the initiation of the public scoping period. The press release summarized the EA and detailed ways the public could provide scoping comments.

The BLM sent two emails inviting cooperating agencies and interested parties to the scoping meetings. On September 9, 2013, BLM sent an email invitation to the cooperating agencies involved in the CCSM Project, and on September 11, 2013, the BLM sent an email invitation to the signatories of the cultural resources Programmatic Agreement contained in the ROD (BLM 2012). Appendix A lists the federal, state, and local agencies that were notified.

As part of the notification process, the BLM distributed “storefront” flyers to community centers and local businesses in Rawlins and Saratoga, Wyoming announcing the public scoping meetings. The BLM scoping period was originally scheduled to end on October 9, 2013, but the federal government shut down on October 1, 2013 and BLM staff and scoping materials posted to the BLM website (e.g., comment card, maps, etc.) were unavailable. As a result, the BLM extended the scoping period to November 4, 2013. The BLM emailed the cooperating agencies and interested parties on October 18, 2013 and issued a press release on October 25, 2013 and to announce the new closing date for the scoping period.

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

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 cooperating agencies on the CCSM Project EAs:

- Federal Agencies
 - Department of the Interior (including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
 - Department of Agriculture (including the U.S. Forest Service)
- State Agencies
 - State of Wyoming (including 12 departments)
- Local Agencies
 - Carbon County (including four departments and County Commissioners)
 - Little Snake River Conservation District
 - Medicine Bow Conservation District
 - Saratoga Encampment Rawlins Conservation District

- City of Rawlins
- City of Saratoga

2.1.2 Tribal Government-to-Government Consultation

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 United States Code [U.S.C.] 470) requires federal agencies to take into account the effects that their approvals and federally funded activities and programs have on historic properties and traditional cultural properties. “Historic properties” include those properties included in, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) (36 CFR 800.16(1)(1)). BLM conducted Tribal Consultation during development of the CCSM EIS as required by law and outlined in the ROD (BLM 2012).

For the infrastructure components EA, the BLM has continued its collaboration with tribal governments by inviting representatives to the scoping meetings via email on September 11, 2013.

2.2 SCOPING MEETINGS

BLM hosted two public scoping meetings: one in Saratoga, and one in Rawlins, Wyoming. The BLM also hosted two cooperating agency meetings prior to the public meetings. Table 1 provides the dates, locations, and number of attendees at each scoping meeting. Appendix B provides the display boards and informational materials presented to the public at the scoping meetings.

Table 1. Scoping Meetings Attendance

Meeting Location	Entities Attending	Meeting Date/Time	Number of Attendees
Saratoga, Wyoming	Cooperating Agencies	September 23, 2013 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	8
Saratoga, Wyoming	Public	September 23, 2013 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	39
Rawlins, Wyoming	Cooperating Agencies	September 24, 2013 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.	11
Rawlins, Wyoming	Public	September 24, 2013 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	14

The BLM and PCW presented information on the infrastructure component EA at 4:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. on Monday, September 23. On Tuesday, September 24, the BLM and PCW presented the same information at 2:30 p.m., 4:30 p.m., and 6:00 p.m.

For interested persons not able to attend the public meetings, the BLM posted all of the scoping meeting materials on their website, including the comment form and a fact sheet describing the infrastructure components, as well as all of the maps presented at the scoping meetings.

2.2.1 Summary of Attendees

At the Saratoga meeting on September 23, the following cooperating agencies attended: Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service; Wyoming

Game and Fish Department; Carbon County Commissioners; Carbon County Planning and Development Department; and the City of Rawlins and Saratoga.

Members of the public and other interested parties attending the September 23 meeting included the City of Saratoga Planning Commission, Saratoga/Platte Valley Chamber of Commerce, media (Bigfoot Radio and Saratoga Sun), Voices of the Valley community organization, private contracting companies and business owners, the University of Wyoming, Battle Pass Scenic Byway Alliance, ranchers and other members of the community.

At the Rawlins meeting on September 24, the following cooperating agencies attended: Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; Wyoming Game and Fish Department; Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality – Water Quality Division; Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality – Industrial Siting Division; Carbon County Commissioners; Carbon County departments; and the City of Rawlins.

Members of the public and other interested parties attending the September 24 meeting included one representative from the State of Wyoming legislature, The Alliance for Historic Wyoming, and private contracting companies and business owners.

2.3 SUMMARY OF SCOPING COMMENTS

BLM received a total of 20 comment letters during the public scoping period either via email or U.S. Postal Service mail. These comment letters contained a total of 35 individual comments. 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 a spreadsheet. 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 EA process.

Once the individual comments were compiled in the spreadsheet, comments were categorized by the topic or resource area they addressed (e.g., wildlife, socioeconomic, etc.). The comprehensive list of scoping comments was sorted by resource and is presented in Appendix C. Some of the scoping comments were eliminated from consideration in the EA because they addressed issues outside of the scope of detailed analyses or the comment stated an opinion (e.g., I oppose/support this project).

CHAPTER 3. IDENTIFICATION OF ISSUES

Information gained during scoping assists BLM in identifying the potential environmental issues, and mitigation measures associated with development of the proposed project. As previously discussed, the scoping process provides a mechanism for narrowing the scope of issues so that the EA can focus the analysis on areas of high interest and concern. A majority of the comments were related to impacts to wildlife resources, especially Greater Sage-Grouse and big game, socioeconomic issues, cumulative impacts, and water resources. The following summarizes the key concerns expressed during scoping.

Air Resources

- Concern was expressed over the potential for wind-blown dust to degrade air quality and an aggressive dust control program was recommended to maintain the existing air quality.

Cultural Resources

- Concern was expressed about visual impacts to contributing segments of the Overland Trail and protection of Key Observation Points (KOPs).

Rangeland Resources

- Concern was expressed over restriction of access to lands where livestock grazing lease holders have permits or valid existing rights.
- It was suggested that the EA should address how the CCSM infrastructure components will be constructed while still permitting other uses.

Socioeconomic

- Commenters expressed concern that the influx of non-resident workers needed for construction will disrupt the local housing market, and the cumulative impacts due to the multiple energy-related construction projects in the area and other industrial employment needs.
- Concern about workers in hotel and motel rooms for longer stays contributing to the loss of available short-term accommodations for the tourism and recreation industry. Further analysis was requested to assess the timing and need for temporary housing facilities and the use of hotel and motel rooms for longer stays.
- Commenters noted the importance of incorporating the information contained in the BLM's recently-released 2012-2022 Socioeconomic Strategic Plan.

Travel and Transportation

- Commenters were concerned about the industrial use of Carbon County Road 407 and the probability of significant road damage, and requested a pre-construction baseline survey to determine existing road conditions and a commitment from PCW to return the road to the original or better condition.
- Commenters requested that the public is allowed use of the Haul Road.

Vegetation

- Concern was expressed about the potential spread of invasive species and “timely” reclamation of disturbance areas.

Water

- General concern was expressed over impacts to water quality and resources.
- The EA should explain how soils, groundwater and surface water impacted by spills, leaks and releases of chemicals, petroleum products and produced water will be restored.
- Commenters urged that monitoring and reporting best management practices be required for this project.
- Commenters requested an analysis of impacts to proposed stream crossings.
- Commenter requested an analysis of how PCW intends to maximize avoidance of surface disturbance within 100 feet of ephemeral streams and 500 feet of perennial streams as outlined in Appendix D of the ROD.

Wildlife

- Concern was expressed about adequately assessing impacts to Greater Sage-Grouse and their habitat, raptor species, fisheries, mountain plover, and big game (mule deer, elk, and antelope) migration patterns.
- It was suggested that sufficient data should be collected regarding big game use of the project area and their migration routes with regard to the Haul Road and specifically Miller Hill.
- Commenters requested an analysis of noise impacts and traffic impacts on fisheries, big game habitat, and areas of public land utilized by hunters and fisherman.
- Concerns were expressed related to the cumulative impacts analysis, specifically Greater Sage-Grouse impacts.

Other concerns were directly related to wind turbine development, which is not a component of this EA, but will be addressed in subsequent EAs for the CCSM Project.

CHAPTER 4. ACTIVITIES FOLLOWING SCOPING

The NEPA process provides opportunities for public input. Following the scoping period, the EA will be prepared incorporating information received from the public during the scoping period. When the EA is complete, BLM will prepare, if appropriate and the analysis supports the determination, a draft Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), and will make the final EA and unsigned FONSI available for public review and comment. During the review period, the public can comment on key issues and the adequacy of the documents. Following the review period, the BLM will prepare the Decision Record, if appropriate, and make it available for public review. Table 2 summarizes these opportunities and provides an anticipated schedule for these activities.

Table 2. Opportunities for Public Participation in the NEPA Process

Steps in the Process	Anticipated Date
Publication of the EA	1 st Quarter 2014
Close of EA Public Review Period	1 st Quarter 2014
Publication of the FONSI, if supported by analysis in the Infrastructure Component EA	1 st Quarter 2014
Publication of the Decision Record	Spring 2014

EA Environmental Assessment
FONSI Finding of No Significant Impact
NEPA National Environmental Policy Act

CHAPTER 5. REFERENCES

Bureau of Land Management (BLM). 2012. Record of Decision for the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project and Approved Visual Resource Management Plan Amendment. October.

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