

SunZia Frequently Asked Questions for Record of Decision Notice of Availability

What is the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project?

SunZia Transmission, LLC (SunZia), submitted an application to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) New Mexico State Office on March 27, 2020, to request amendment of their existing right-of-way on public land that was issued in September of 2016; updated applications were subsequently submitted on December 21, 2020, and September 14, 2021. The application to amend the existing right-of-way grant authorization includes right-of-way components of the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (Project) located outside of the previously granted right-of-way. The amendment, consistent with the original right-of-way grant, includes up to two 500-kilovolt transmission lines located on Federal, State, and private lands between Torrance County, New Mexico, and Pinal County, Arizona. The permitted route originates at a planned substation in Torrance County, New Mexico, and terminates at the existing Pinal Central Substation in Pinal County, Arizona.

Prior environmental documents include a Final Environmental Impact Statement (DOI-BLM-NM-0000-2009-0081-EIS) in 2013, a subsequent Environmental Assessment (DOI-BLM-NM-900-2015-1) and Finding of No New Significant Impact in 2015 to accommodate burial of approximately five miles of the transmission line in three locations within the Department of Defense's White Sands Missile Range Northern Call-Up Area, a Record of Decision in 2015, and a subsequent Final Environmental Impact Statement in 2023. The BLM issued a right-of-way grant to SunZia in 2016, authorizing use of a 400-foot-wide right-of-way across 183 miles of public lands administered by the BLM. To date, construction on the lines has not begun.

The current Record of Decision is amending only four components of the existing right-of-way grant and is not re-siting the entire previously approved route (See Figure 1 below). These amendments to SunZia's existing right-of-way are the scope of this Project, not re-siting the entire path for the transmission line. See the **Project Introduction** document for more information and maps.

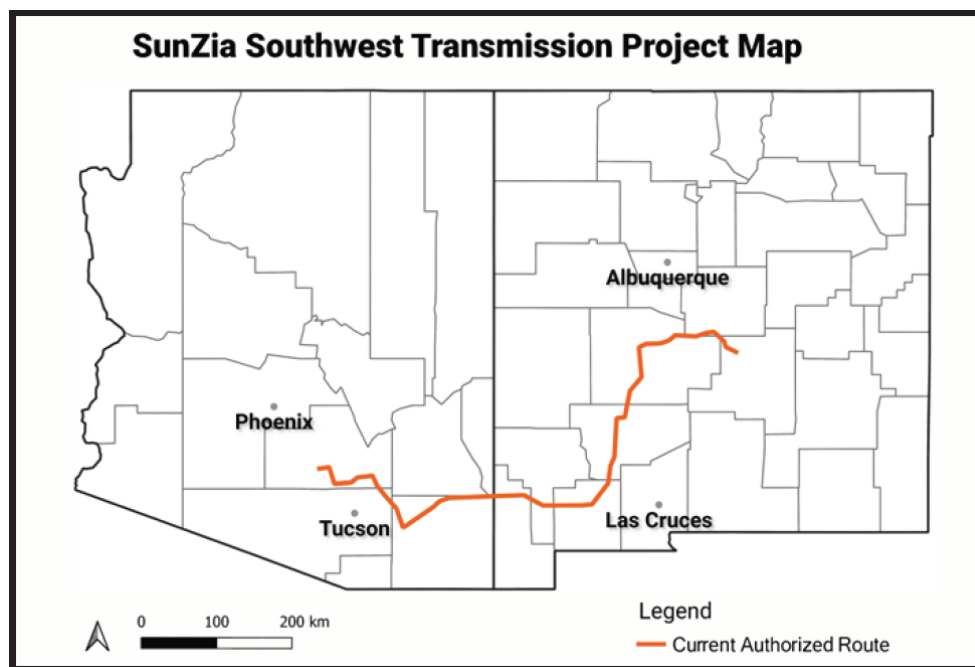


Figure 1: 2015 Permitted SunZia Southwest Transmission Project Route (Previously Approved)

What is the status of the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project?

The BLM has issued a Record of Decision providing the rationale for the BLM's Selected Alternative and the BLM's decision to issue an amended right-of-way grant under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 for the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Project facilities on BLM administered lands under certain terms and conditions. In addition, the BLM has chosen to amend the Socorro Resource Management Plan for nonconforming actions resulting from amending the right-of-way for the Project. The approval of this decision constitutes the final decision of the BLM and, in accordance with the regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations § 4.410(a)(3), is not subject to appeal under Departmental regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 4.

What was considered in the BLM's Decision?

The BLM considered information such as, but not limited to, environmental impacts disclosed in the 2013 and 2023 Final Environmental Impact Statements, public interest (pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 Section 206(a) and 43 Code of Federal Regulations § 2200.0-6(b)(1) and (2)), and conformance with the BLM Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan when making a determination in the Record of Decision.

The BLM analyzed alternatives for the Component 3 – Segment 4 reroute and approved Alternative Routes 2 and 3 which include crossing the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge as well as paralleling the SunZia Transmission Line with the Western Spirit 345-kilovolt Transmission Line at the Rio Grande Crossing.

What is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's decision to be made?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will evaluate applications for authorizations of temporary construction and long-term maintenance and operation activities that will occur outside existing easement footprints and issue any required decisions separately. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will follow their own internal process for determining what permits are required for this project to cross the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge and whether or not to issue them. This includes any applicable compatibility determination. They may use the analysis in this Environmental Impact Statement to help make those determinations and supplemental National Environmental Policy Act documentation may be necessary.

What is the BLM Selected Alternative?

The 2023 Final Environmental Impact Statement identified an Agency Proposed Alternative. An Agency Proposed Alternative is the alternative that the lead agency, the BLM in this case, prefers above the other Project alternatives. The Record of Decision discloses the rationale for selecting the BLM Proposed Alternative (See Figure 2 below). The components of the selected alternative are as follows:

- Component 1: Localized route modifications 1–5, and the 2015 Selected Route (the no action alternative in this Environmental Impact Statement) for local route modification 6 in the Pinal Central area
- Component 2: All access roads and temporary workspaces outside the granted right-of-way
- Component 3: Alternative Route 2 (Subroute 2A-1) and Alternative Route 3 (Subroute 3A-1), which include crossing the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge as well as co-locating the proposed SunZia Transmission Line with the Western Spirit 345-kilovolt Transmission Line at the Rio Grande crossing. For Subroute 3A-1, the agency's Selected Alternative includes Local Alternative 3B-2 to avoid two private residences near the Project.

- Component 4: The 2015 Selected Alternative co-locates the ground disturbance associated with the high-voltage direct-current converter station (the SunZia West Substation) with the existing development and ground disturbance associated with the Salt River Project Pinal Central Substation.

The BLM's rationale for the selected alternative is:

- For Component 1, it avoids existing landowner conflicts and constraints that have developed along the six localized route modifications since the 2015 Selected Route was identified.
- For Component 2, it accommodates the necessary, additional rights-of-way for SunZia to successfully access, construct, and operate the Project.
- For Component 3, the agency Selected Alternative
 - is the shortest route within Segment 4 to connect the eastern terminus of the Project with the 2015 Selected Route for Segment 3.
 - avoids impacts to the Ladron Mountain-Devil's Backbone Complex area of critical environmental concern.
 - uses two separate existing transmission easements within the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge and parallels existing infrastructure and transmission lines outside of the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, including:
 - co-location (on the same transmission structures) with 14 miles of the El Paso Electric transmission line (Alternative Route 2) and 12 miles of the Tri-State transmission line (Alternative Route 3) within the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, and
 - paralleling 33 miles of the Western Spirit 345-kilovolt Transmission Line Project north of the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge, across the Rio Grande, and through portions of the eastern end of Segment 4; and
 - avoids impacts to military operations associated with the White Sands Missile Range Northern Call-up Area.

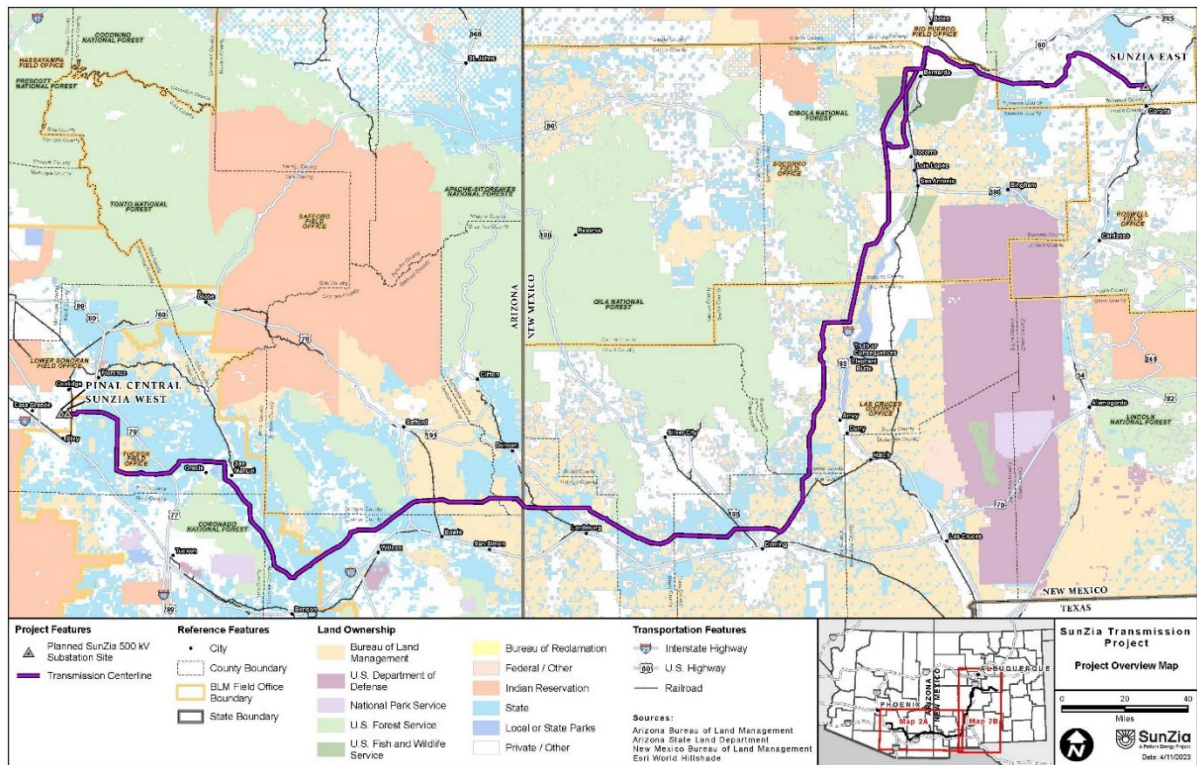


Figure 2: Agency Selected Alternative

Did the BLM receive any protests for the Final Environmental Impact Statement?

The BLM received nine protest letters during the 30-day protest period ending on March 19, 2023. The protest period was established in accordance with 43 Code of Federal Regulations § 1610.5-2. The BLM evaluated all protest letters to determine which protest letters were complete and timely, and which persons held standing to protest. Of the nine letters received, six met these criteria. Three letters were dismissed from consideration due to lack of standing. Three of the nine timely filed protests were dismissed because they provided comment but did not present valid issues. Three of the letters had valid protest issues regarding the following topics: consistency with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997; unnecessary and undue degradation; impacts analysis; range of alternatives; reasonably foreseeable future actions; public involvement; and Section 106 consultation-Tribal consultation. Each of these three protests was denied.

Now that the Record of Decision has been issued, what is the next step in the Project's process?

The Record of Decision was issued following the 30-day protest period and concurrent 60-day Governor's Consistency Review (February 17, 2023 – April 19, 2023). The approval of the decision constitutes the final decision of the Department of the Interior and, in accordance with the regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations § 4.410(a)(3), is not subject to appeal under Departmental regulations at 43 Code of Federal Regulations Part 4. Any challenge to these decisions, including the BLM Authorized Officer's issuance of the right-of-way grant, as approved by the Assistant Secretary of Lands and Minerals Management's decision, must be brought in the Federal District Court. Additionally, any challenge to this decision is subject to 42 United States Code § 4370m-6. The next step in the Project's process is for the BLM to issue a Notice to Proceed that will allow SunZia to proceed with construction of the Transmission Line.

Construction or other surface disturbance associated with the amended right-of-way grant as reflected in the 2023 Record of Decision shall not occur until BLM issues a written Notice to Proceed. The BLM will issue the Notice to Proceed once requirements to receive a Notice to Proceed are met, including obtaining all Federal, State, county, local, and private authorizations or express written permissions necessary for the entire Project and complying with all preconstruction requirements outlined in the right-of-way grant.

How do I access the Record of Decision?

You can access the Record of Decision on the BLM's Project ePlanning website at <http://ow.ly/HEkm50MxXbG>. Click "Documents" on the menu on the left.

What if I have questions about the SunZia Transmission Line Project?

- Visit the BLM ePlanning site for this Project: <http://ow.ly/HEkm50MxXbG>
- Contact Virginia Alguire, Project Manager, BLM Socorro Field Office at 575-838-1290
- Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States. Call the Project hotline at 1-888-959-2510

What is the need for the transmission line? How would it fit into the regional electric grid?

In 2010, the National Renewable Energy Laboratory identified New Mexico as one of the top 10 wind potential states; however, new transmission infrastructure is needed to tap its wind energy potential. In central New Mexico, near Corona, where SunZia's transmission line will begin, there is more than 4,500 megawatts of wind energy capacity. The capacity of two 500-kilovolt transmission lines will transport that energy over the 550 miles of the Project route, to reach power markets in Arizona and California.

What is the National Environmental Policy Act?

The National Environmental Policy Act was passed by Congress in 1969 and signed into law on January 1, 1970. This law established a landmark national environmental policy, which, among other things, encourages environmental protection and informed decision-making. It provides the means to carry out these goals by:

- Mandating that every Federal agency prepare a detailed statement of the effects of "major Federal actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment"
- Establishing the need for agencies to consider alternatives to those actions
- Requiring the use of an interdisciplinary process in developing alternatives and analyzing environmental effects
- Requiring that each agency consult with and obtain comments of any Federal agency which has jurisdiction by law or special expertise with respect to any environmental impact involved
- Requiring that detailed statements and the comments and views of the appropriate Federal, State, tribal, and local agencies be made available to the public

The National Environmental Policy Act process is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment (40 Code of Federal Regulations 1500.1(a)).

Please see the following websites for more information on National Environmental Policy Act and environmental impact statements:

- [The Council on Environmental Quality's Citizen's Guide to National Environmental Policy Act](#)
- [The BLM's National Environmental Policy Act Handbook](#)
- [The Council on Environmental Quality's Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning National Environmental Policy Act Regulations](#)

What is an Environmental Impact Statement?

An environmental impact statement is prepared for major Federal actions that may have a significant effect on the environment. The purpose of an environmental impact statement is to identify potential environmental issues related to the project, analyze the project's impacts on resources, describe alternative actions, disclose impacts to the public, and support informed decisions.

The Environmental Impact Statement is a public document, and the public was encouraged to provide input throughout the development of the Environmental Impact Statement. In addition to the public, the Environmental Impact Statement informs Federal, State, and local permitting agencies as well as cooperating agencies and Native American Tribes, the amendments to SunZia's right-of-way grant requires a plan amendment to the Socorro Field Office Resource Management Plan, which is analyzed in the Environmental Impact Statement.

The Environmental Impact Statement is not a decision document, but it is intended to provide information to the BLM and other agency decision makers to support informed decisions. While the BLM's decision applies only to the land that it manages, its Environmental Impact Statement analyzes impacts to all potentially affected lands. Decisions on non-BLM land will be made by the appropriate agencies and landowners.

How was the Final Environmental Impact Statement prepared?

There are several steps involved in preparing an environmental impact statement, as defined by the National Environmental Policy Act and the Council on Environmental Quality's regulations implementing National Environmental Policy Act. See the diagram below (Figure 3) for a visual representation of the process.

The environmental impact statement process began with the publication of a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement in the *Federal Register*. The Notice of Intent initiated the scoping period, during which agencies, groups, and the public provided feedback and submitted their comments for review. The BLM and cooperating agencies then used the information derived from internal and public scoping comments to identify data sources, inform the development of a range of reasonable alternatives, define the scope of analysis for the Environmental Impact Statement, identify resource issues for detailed analysis, and solicit other information to be used in the development of the Environmental Impact Statement. The process was documented and potential impacts to each alternative were disclosed in the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements.

Following the scoping period, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement was prepared with information gathered during scoping. Then a Notice of Availability for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement was published in the *Federal Register* on May 2, 2022, initiating a 90-day public comment period. After public review of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, substantive comments were considered and incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Statement and a Notice of Availability for the Final Environmental Impact Statement was published in the *Federal Register* on February 17, 2023. The BLM has included substantive comments, as well as the responses, in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

The environmental impact statement process ends with the issuance of the Record of Decision. The Record of Decision approves, approves with stipulations, or does not approve the proposed

action. The Record of Decision is issued following a 30-day protest period and a 60-day Governor’s consistency review.

National Environmental Policy Act Process

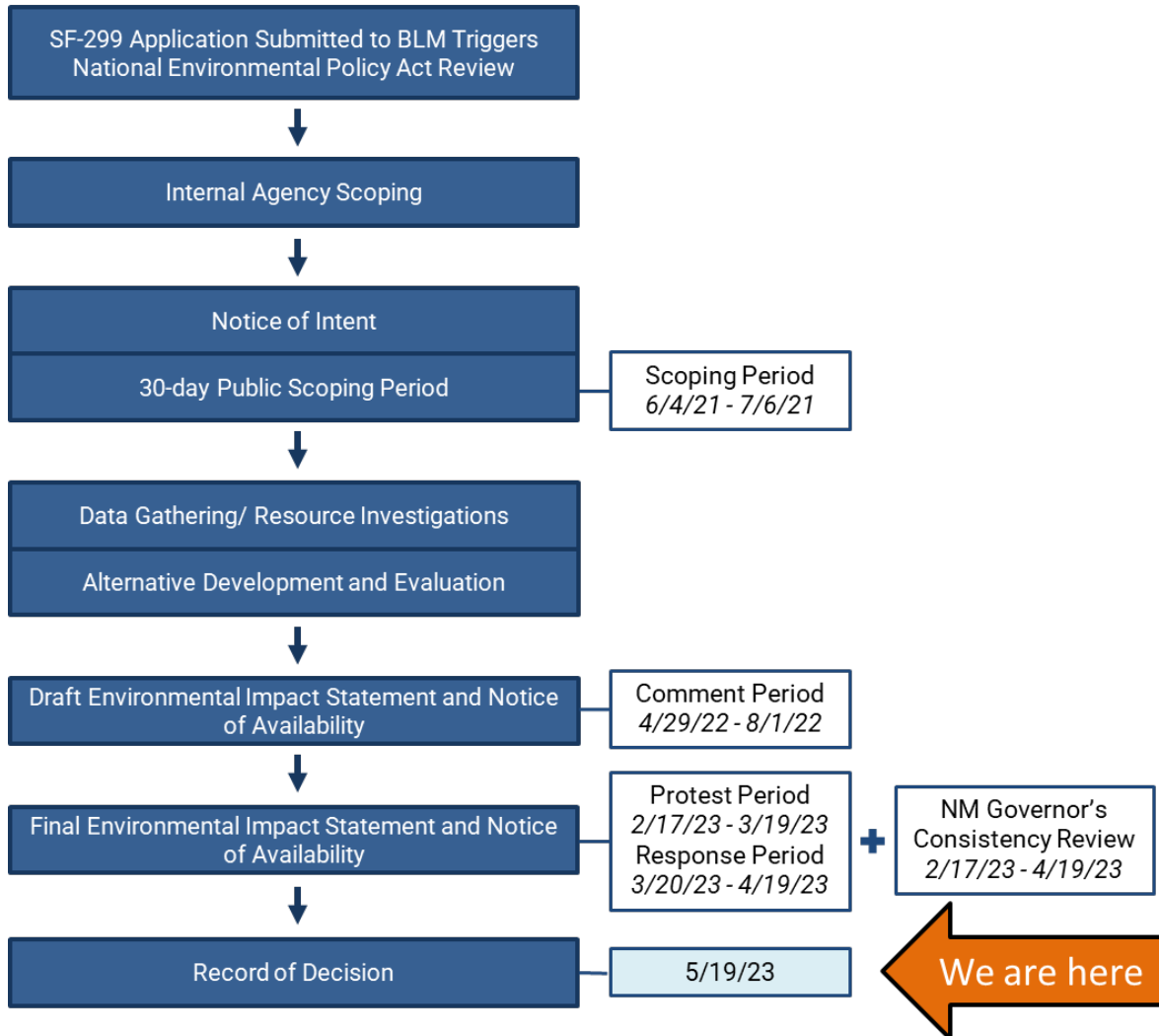


Figure 3: National Environmental Policy Act Process

What would the transmission line look like?

The transmission line structures measure about 135 feet tall. Tower heights will vary from 100 to 170 feet in height, depending on terrain. The distance between structures ranges from 1,200 to 1,600 feet (3-4 structures per mile). The right-of-way grant area will be approximately 400 feet wide. The approved structures will include a combination of guyed and self-supporting steel tubular and lattice structures, although the final structure types used will depend on site-specific engineering design and land use constraints.

The approved alternative co-locates the existing El Paso Electric Company 345-kilovolt and SunZia 500-kilovolt circuits within the existing El Paso Electric Company 345-kilovolt easement. The existing 98 wooden H-frame structures will be replaced with monopole (single pole) or H-frame steel structures.

The approved alternative to co-locate SunZia's route with the Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. easement will replace Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc.'s existing 115-kilovolt transmission line structures with double-circuit, monopole (single pole) structures that support both the Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. line and the approved SunZia line in a vertical configuration. The new transmission line structures measure on average 165-200 feet in height compared to the existing Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. structures, which are between 60-80 feet in height.

How are the interests of Tribal governments taken into consideration?

Tribal consultation is required under Executive Order 13175 Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments. In addition, tribal consultations are required under the National Historic Preservation Act process when undertakings have the potential to affect properties significant to Native American Tribes.

Extensive tribal consultation and coordination were conducted for the initial right-of-way application and in support of the first Environmental Impact Statement process from 2009–2015. That outreach is summarized in the 2013 Final Environmental Impact Statement.

For the current right-of-way amendment, in support of this current Environmental Impact Statement, additional outreach has been conducted. In December 2020, the BLM contacted the following federally recognized tribes to notify them of the requested right-of-way amendment, to re-initiate nation-to-nation consultation, invite them to participate as cooperating agencies in preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement, and to participate in the Section 106 consultation. Twenty-nine federally recognized tribes were contacted in December 2020:

- Ak-Chin Indian Community, Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Caddo Indian Tribe, Comanche Indian Tribe, Fort Sill Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Jicarilla Apache Nation, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Navajo Nation, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Isleta, Pueblo of Jemez, Pueblo of Laguna, Pueblo of Sandia, Pueblo of Santo Domingo, Pueblo of Taos, Pueblo of Tesuque, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, Tonto Apache Tribe, White Mountain Apache, Wichita and Affiliated Tribes, Yavapai-Apache Nation, Ysleta del Sur Pueblo

Subsequent outreach includes: the Scoping Report was sent to the tribes listed above on August 5, 2021. The alternatives report was made available to the tribes listed above in spring 2022. The tribes listed above were also provided notice that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and associated files were published on April 29, 2022. The BLM has had continued coordination with the tribes (and other consulting parties) via submittal of annual reports from 2015 to current (2022), inventory reports, historic property treatment plans and more. One tribe, the Tohono O'odham Nation, was designated, at their request, as a Signatory to the 2014 Programmatic Agreement but declined to sign. On February 16, 2023, BLM provided participating tribes advanced notice of and access to the Final Environmental Impact Statement. The 16 tribes contacted are as follows:

- Ak-Chin Indian Community, Comanche Nation of Oklahoma, Fort Sill Apache Tribe of Oklahoma, Gila River Indian Community, Hopi Tribe, Kiowa Tribe of Oklahoma, Mescalero Apache Tribe, Pascua Yaqui Tribe, Pueblo of Isleta, Pueblo of Sandia, Pueblo of Ysleta del Sur, Pueblo of Zuni, Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community, San Carlos Apache Tribe, Tohono O'odham Nation, White Mountain Apache

BLM has continued to engage the tribes named above when the consulting parties are contacted.