

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## Lahontan Substation Rebuild and Upgrade Project

### Finding of No Significant Impact

FONSI No. LO-2012-1023

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## **Background and Purpose and Need**

The Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Lahontan Basin Office has evaluated the potential environmental consequences of the construction of a new substation, and abandonment and removal of the existing substation by Sierra Pacific Power Company dba NV Energy (NV Energy) on Reclamation-managed land. The project is called the Lahontan Substation Rebuild and Upgrade Project (Project). The existing Lahontan Substation was constructed in the 1950s and is beyond its useful life. The substation is the primary source for customers in the Fallon, Nevada, area as well as the Naval Air Station, and brings geothermal generation into NV Energy's system from the Stillwater, Nevada area. Upgrades to the substation are necessary to more reliably serve NV Energy's customers. The need for the Proposed Action is to bring the Lahontan Substation facilities up-to-date and get them operating in a reliable fashion, and authorization and issuance of a license is needed for the construction of a new substation on Reclamation-managed lands.

In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for the utilization of Reclamation-managed land. The EA considered two alternatives: the Proposed Action and the No-Action Alternative. The EA was prepared by NV Energy under the direction of Reclamation.

In addition to the NEPA, actions of Reclamation are guided by a number of statutes, regulations, and agreements, including Endangered Species Act (ESA), Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and other pertinent state, local, or county regulations. Opportunities were provided for public review of and comment on the EA. Scoping letters for the EA were mailed to interested parties and the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone Tribe of west-central Nevada on October 24, 2013. The letter announced the preparation of an EA and requested comments on the proposed Project. Reclamation reviewed and considered all comments received.

## **Alternatives Including Proposed Action**

### **No-Action Alternative**

Under the No-Action Alternative, Reclamation would not approve NV Energy's SF-299 Application for the construction of a new substation. The existing substation would remain in use, no new substation facilities would be constructed, and reliability of the electrical service to the Fallon, Nevada area and the Naval Air Station may diminish over time.

### **Proposed Action**

The Proposed Action is to issue a license for NV Energy's SF-299 Application for the construction of a new substation, which would be adjacent to the existing Lahontan Substation on lands under Reclamation's jurisdiction, located in Churchill County, Nevada. The Project would consist of rebuilding the Lahontan Substation approximately 200 feet to the northeast of the existing site, and would involve the installation of a 4.5/7.5 Million Volt-Amperes (MVA) regulator, seven 69-kilovolt (kV) circuit breakers, a 69-kV circuit switcher, instrument transformers, service transformers, switches, capacitor bank, new control enclosure to accommodate new protection panels, new remote terminal unit (RTU), and telecom

infrastructure, including fiber optic cables. In addition to the substation components, NV Energy proposes to construct a new 200-foot access road and to realign six 60-kV transmission lines. The 60-kV transmission line realignments would require the removal of approximately 18 existing wood single-pole structures and the placement of approximately five new wood single-pole tangent structures and 12 new wood single-pole angle structures. Ground disturbance for the proposed Project would include approximately 14.8 acres of construction disturbance. Of those 14.8 acres, approximately 2.3 acres would be permanent ground disturbance for the substation site, 200 feet of access road, and approximately 17 new structure locations.

The existing Lahontan Substation would be deconstructed and removed, however the perimeter fence and gravel surface would be left for use as a storage area by the Nevada Division of State Parks. Deconstruction of the existing substation would include the removal of the above-ground equipment. Concrete and steel foundations would be left in place along with the existing gravel surface and perimeter fencing. Oil spills on the existing site would be cleaned by removing contaminated soil.

## **Findings**

Based on the attached EA, Reclamation finds that the Proposed Action will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment. The attached EA describes the existing environmental resources in the Project area, evaluates the effects of the No Action and Proposed Action Alternatives on the resources, and proposes measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any adverse effects. This EA was prepared in accordance with the NEPA (42 United States Code 4321-4347), Council of Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural requirements of the NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500–1508), and the Department of the Interior NEPA regulations (43 CFR Part 46).

Effects on several environmental resources were examined and any adverse impacts are minor and restricted to short-term, localized events. No significant effects were identified for any resource. This analysis is provided in the attached EA, and the analysis in the EA is hereby incorporated by reference.

## **Cultural and Archaeological Resources**

Reclamation identified one historic property within the area of potential effect (APE), the Fallon Cutoff segment (CrNV-03-5419), and multiple historic properties adjacent to the APE and related to the Newlands Project (Lahontan Dam and Power Plant, Truckee Canal, Lahontan Dam government camp, and Lahontan City). Although located within the Project APE, the Fallon Cutoff segment would not be adversely affected by the Project. Indirect effects, largely visual in nature, are considered to be minimal given the amount of development in the area and the fact that power transmission infrastructure has long been an element of the local landscape as well as a subordinate component of the Newlands Project.

Reclamation initiated consultation with the Nevada State Preservation Office (SHPO) by letter and SHPO responded July 22, 2014, concurring with Reclamation's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties. The proposed action will not have significant impacts on properties

listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places and will result in no adverse effect to historic properties pursuant to 36 CFR Part 800.5(a)(1).

### **Indian Trust Assets**

No land or trust income resources would be affected by the Proposed Action, as there are no trust assets in the proximity of the Project.

### **Indian Sacred Sites**

There will be no impacts that would adversely affect the physical integrity of Indian Sacred Sites and that access to, or ceremonial use of such sites would not be restricted because there are no known sites within the project area.

### **Geologic Hazards, Mineral Resources, and Soil Resources**

The Project site does not include any mineral resource locations; therefore, there would be no Project-associated impacts on these resources. The potential for geologic hazards, such as earthquakes, that could impact the Project site is low. Effects on soil resources are linked to ground-disturbing activities that would be closely associated with vegetation clearing and grading of the substation site, access road, and transmission-pole locations. Proper mitigation measures would be required during construction of the Proposed Action in order to avoid or minimize damage resulting from erosion and to prevent acceleration of soil erosion beyond natural levels.

### **Land Use and Recreation**

The Proposed Action presents a minimal direct-land-use impact within the study area because the Project site, access road, and transmission structure locations are located on land that is currently vacant and adjacent to the existing substation site and transmission lines. Minimal changes to recreational opportunities would result through the implementation of the Proposed Action.

### **Vegetation and Special-Status Plants**

There will be approximately 14.8 acres of temporary ground disturbance and of the 14.8 acres, 2.3 acres of permanent ground disturbance of native Intermountain Basins Mixed Salt Desert Scrub would occur to allow for construction of the proposed substation, access road, and transmission lines. Intermountain Basins Mixed Salt Desert Scrub is a regionally abundant vegetation community with relatively low species diversity. Riparian and wetland vegetation within the Project site boundary would not be affected by the Proposed Action.

No special-status plants would be affected by the Proposed Action. The single Sagebrush Cholla observed within the site boundary is not located in an area that would be disturbed as a result of the Proposed Action.

## **Visual Resources**

Impacts to scenic quality are anticipated to be low/moderate for the Proposed Action because of existing structures and access roads. Impacts to viewers, including recreation, travelers, and residents, are anticipated to be low to moderate for the Project.

## **Water Resources**

The likelihood for the Proposed Action to impact surface water or groundwater quality is minimal.

## **Wildlife and Special-Status Wildlife**

Approximately 14.8 acres of native vegetation would be temporarily disturbed under the Proposed Action. Although some wildlife would be present, the low diversity and productivity of vegetation within the Project site does not support a high diversity of wildlife species. The extent of temporary and permanent disturbance associated with the Project is not anticipated to affect local or regional populations of any species.

Special-status bat species are anticipated to primarily forage along the Carson River and nearby wetlands, rather than the low-productivity vegetation within the site boundary. The Pale Kangaroo Mouse and special-status birds may occur within the site boundary. Preconstruction surveys for Pale Kangaroo Mouse burrows would indicate whether avoidance or relocation would be recommended. Preconstruction nesting bird surveys would take place prior to any construction activities during the nesting season, typically from March through August.

## **Air Quality and Noise**

Project construction activities would produce fugitive dust and engine emissions. Ground disturbing activities that would result in fugitive dust include site preparation for the new substation site, erecting new transmission structures, removing existing transmission structures, and removing equipment from the existing substation site. Emissions from construction engines and fugitive dust would be short term and occur during the six months of construction activities. Best management practices (BMPs), such as watering during ground disturbing activities, would reduce impacts to air quality.

## **Climate Change**

The Project would produce greenhouse gases during the approximately six-month period of construction, through vehicle and equipment fuel burning, and are not expected to produce appreciable cumulative effects to greenhouse gas emissions.

## **Environmental Justice**

Environmental justice is not affected by the Proposed Action, because there are no disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations.

## **Cumulative Effects**

Impacts to cultural and archaeological resources could occur if unanticipated discoveries were made during construction activities, however, based on the detailed Class III cultural inventory, cultural resource impacts are anticipated to be insignificant. Visual impacts are related to the introduction of new facilities into the landscape, ground disturbance, the presence of existing facilities, and sensitive viewers. Cumulative impacts from the Project would be reduced because the new facilities would replace existing facilities, and there are similar types of industrial and utility facilities in the area of influence. Based on the relatively small permanent ground disturbance (2.3 acres), the temporary construction activity period, and the use of BMPs, cumulative impacts to soil resources, land use, recreation, vegetation, water resources, wildlife, air quality and noise, and climate change are expected to be minimal.

## **Consultation and Coordination**

This section describes the consultation and coordination activities Reclamation has carried out with interested agencies, organizations, tribes, and individuals while preparing the EA. The NEPA and Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations require the public's involvement in the decision-making process, as well as allow for full environmental disclosure. Copies of the letters and the mailing list are included as an appendix to the EA.

Scoping letters for the EA were mailed to interested parties and tribes on October 24, 2013. The letter announced the preparation of an EA and requested comments on the proposed Project. One comment letter was received during Scoping from the National Park Service (NPS). The comment provided by the NPS National Trails Intermountain Region Archaeologist verified the location of the California National Historic Trail in relation to the Project, called attention to additional potential cultural resources within the Project vicinity, and noted that any trail remnant in that area would have likely been destroyed by previous development.

The Draft EA was provided for a 15-day public review and comment period on May 14, 2014 at [www.usbr.gov/mp](http://www.usbr.gov/mp), at the Churchill County Library, and at the Bureau of Reclamation, Lahontan Basin Area Office which is located in Carson City, Nevada. A news release was issued and notice of availability was sent to those on the mailing list. No new comments were received during the comment period.

## **Decision**

Based on the analysis of the environmental impacts, as described in the Final EA and on thorough review of public comments received, Reclamation has determined that implementing the Proposed Action will not have a significant impact on the quality of the human environment or the natural resources of the area. A Finding of No Significant Impact is justified for the Proposed Action. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the Proposed Action.