

RECLAMATION

Managing Water in the West

Record of Decision for the Vantage to Pomona Heights 230 kV Transmission Line Project Final Environmental Impact Statement



MISSION STATEMENTS

U.S. Department of the Interior

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The Department of the Interior protects America's natural resources and heritage, honors our cultures and tribal communities, and supplies the energy to power our future.

Bureau of Reclamation

The mission of the Bureau of Reclamation is to manage, develop, and protect water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public.

Summary of Action

The Bureau of Reclamation, Pacific Northwest Region, has adopted the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) for the Vantage to Pomona Heights 230 kV Transmission Line Project (Project) filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EIS No. 20160241) on October 21, 2016, and noticed by the Environmental Protection Agency and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in the Federal Register on October 21, 2016. This FEIS analyzed Pacific Power's proposal to construct, operate, and maintain a new 230 kV transmission line from Pacific Power's Pomona Heights substation located just east of Selah, Washington, in Yakima County, to the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) substation located just east of the Wanapum Dam in Grant County, Washington. This project is known as Vantage to Pomona Heights (V2P). The proposed V2P project is an electric grid reinforcement project identified as necessary by Grant, Benton, and Yakima counties to ensure reliability of the transmission network in the Mid-Columbia area. The Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), in conjunction with the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), has an established System Planning and Operating Criteria that all transmission providers within the Western Interconnection must follow when planning and operating transmission systems. Pacific Power participated in a regional transmission study that showed the addition of a V2P 230kV transmission line would eliminate the redistributed loads and the overloading of the adjacent transmission system and would ensure continued reliable and efficient service to the Yakima Valley.

The lead agency for preparation of the FEIS was the BLM (Oregon/Washington Spokane District). Other cooperating agencies for this environmental impact statement include the following: Reclamation; U.S. Department of the Army Joint Base Lewis-McChord Yakima Training Center (JBLM YTC); BPA; Federal Highway Administration; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service); Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation; Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife; Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR); Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT); and Grant, Kittitas, and Yakima counties.

While the Draft EIS analyzed eight action alternatives as a result of the comments received, a new route alternative was identified in the FEIS. The new alternative's proposed transmission line alignment is located largely on JBLM YTC land, but would also cross over approximately 2 miles of Reclamation-administered land; therefore, Reclamation participated as a cooperating agency for purposes of compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA). Reclamation's proposed action is to grant Pacific Power, with conditions, right-of-way (ROW), and a license to construct, operate, and maintain a 230 kV transmission line across public lands administered by Reclamation with mitigation for impacts identified in the FEIS.

The FEIS was adopted by Reclamation to address Reclamation's response to Pacific Power's updated ROW application SF-299 filed in June 2016 to cross approximately 2 miles of Reclamation-administered lands. Reclamation has relied on information and analyses contained in the FEIS when considering means to avoid, minimize, and compensate for

adverse impacts occurring on Reclamation-administered lands. This includes plans to achieve adequate mitigation for the 230 kV transmission line and the requirement to avoid precluding sufficient future mitigation that may be required for effects on greater sage-grouse from the proposed Wymer Dam and Reservoir Project. The proposed Wymer Dam and Reservoir Project was previously analyzed by Reclamation in the *Yakima River Basin Water Storage Feasibility Study Final Planning Report/Environmental Impact Statement* issued December 2008.

The FEIS and this record of decision have been prepared in accordance with the NEPA, the Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations (40 CFR 1500-1508), and Department of the Interior regulations (43 CFR 46). The decision made here is based on the FEIS.

Alternatives Considered in the FEIS

The FEIS analyzed the No Action Alternative and nine Action Alternatives, including the New Northern Route (NNR) Alternative with Overhead Design Option; Underground Design Option and Manastash Ridge Subroute; as well as Alternatives A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and H. Refer to Figure 1. Each alternative is described briefly below.

No Action Alternative

If no action is taken, Pacific Power's application for ROW on Reclamation-administered lands and other Federal land for the proposed Project would not be granted, and the entire proposed Project would not be constructed. The interconnection of the proposed Project to BPA's Vantage Substation also would not occur. Pacific Power would not be able to address or increase the reliability issues identified in the Northwest Power Pool, Northwest Transmission Assessment Committee Mid-Columbia Transmission Study. Additionally, Pacific Power would be required to develop and implement a remedial action scheme; therefore, would not be compliant with WECC and Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) standards. This would also cause Pacific Power to be non-complaint with NERC standards relating to the provision of reliable power.

NNR Alternative

The NNR Alternative is 40.5 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Kittitas, and Grant counties. The NNR Alternative crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross over land administered by JBLM YTC on its north side for the majority of its length; BLM's Yakima River Canyon Management Area; Grant County Public Utility District (PUD); WSDOT; and private lands. State Route (SR)-243 is crossed in one location south of the Wanapum Dam, and Interstate-82 is crossed south of the Selah Creek Rest Area and near Interstate-82 Exit 11. The NNR Alternative consists of an Overhead Design Option, an Underground Design Option, and a Manastash Ridge Subroute.

Alternative A

This Alternative is 64.7 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross over land administered by JBLM YTC on its southwest side; BLM's Saddle

Mountains Management Area; and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Alternative B

This alternative is 61.2 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Kittitas, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross land administered by JBLM YTC on its southwest side and east side, BLM, Grant County PUD, and would be located primarily on private lands.

Alternative C

This alternative is 63.0 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Kittitas, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross land administered by JBLM YTC on its southwest side and east side, BLM, DNR, Grant County PUD, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Alternative D

This alternative is 66.5 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross land administered by JBLM YTC on its southwest side, BLM's Saddle Mountains Management Area, DNR, Grant County PUD, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

This alternative is 61.6 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Kittitas, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross land administered by JBLM YTC on its east side, BLM, DNR, Grant County PUD, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Alternative F

This alternative is 65.1 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It would avoid JBLM YTC, but would cross BLM's Saddle Mountains Management Area, DNR, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Alternative G

This alternative is 63.4 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Kittitas, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross land administered by JBLM YTC on its east side, BLM, DNR, Grant County PUD, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Alternative H

This alternative is 66.9 miles in length and is located in Yakima, Benton, and Grant counties. It crosses land administered by Reclamation east of the Columbia River. It also would cross

JBLM YTC on its southwest side, BLM's Saddle Mountains Management Area, DNR, and would be located primarily on private lands. It would cross SR-243 in one location west of Vernita Bridge.

Agency Preferred Alternative

The environmentally preferred alternative is the NNR Alternative - Overhead Design Option. Reclamation selected the environmentally preferable alternative as the Agency Preferred Alternative because, based on the best available information and science, which was analyzed and documented in the FEIS, it is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances the resources that are present while achieving Reclamation's proposed action.

Decision and Rationale for the Decision

Based on review of the analysis as documented in the FEIS, Reclamation's decision is to grant Pacific Power (with conditions) ROW and a license to construct, operate, and maintain a 230 kV transmission line across public lands administered by Reclamation. This is consistent with BLM's decision to implement the NNR Alternative - Overhead Design Option, as described in the FEIS. This decision was made after carefully weighing economic, social, and technical considerations, as well as the potentially significant environmental effects analyzed in the FEIS, and after reviewing comments and concerns of agencies, tribes, public and private organizations and individuals.

Particular issues of controversy were adverse effects on and mitigation for greater sage-grouse and its habitat; agricultural, residential, and military land uses; effects on scenic views natural scenery; and archaeological and historic resources. The decision provides the best means to minimize or avoid environmental harm and meet Reclamation's purpose to address Pacific Power's ROW application. No unavoidable adverse environmental effects are expected to remain with implementation of the *Framework for Development of a Greater Sage-Grouse Compensatory Mitigation Plan* (Mitigation Framework).

Other important considerations in reaching the decision included Reclamation's mission of managing, developing, and protecting water and related resources in an environmentally and economically sound manner in the interest of the American public; minimizing effects of crossing lands targeted for acquisition to mitigate impacts on greater sage-grouse from Reclamation's proposed Wymer Dam and Reservoir Project; and avoiding impacts on Indian Trust Assets.

Summary of Comments on the Final EIS

In the 30 days following filing the FEIS with the EPA, two comment documents were received by BLM. The two comment documents did not raise any substantive concerns or issues.

Environmental Commitments

As part of the proposed Project, required design features (RDFs) have been identified and incorporated and will be implemented during construction, operation, and maintenance of the proposed Project. The RDFs are environmental protection measures designed to avoid and minimize environmental impacts from construction, operation, and maintenance activities. Pacific Power has committed to implement these protection measures as part of the development of the proposed Project. The RDFs addressed identified proposed Project impacts, which were developed through an iterative process during the impact analysis with Pacific Power, the BLM, and the cooperating agencies.

A complete list of RDFs is available in Appendix B of BLM's Record of Decision (ROD). The RDFs cover the following topics: construction, operation, and maintenance; biological resources, including botanical, wildlife, and special status species; land use and recreation; transportation; visual resources; cultural resources; wildland fire; climate and air quality; soils, geology, and water resources; and public health and safety.

In addition, the Mitigation Framework was developed to address the residual impacts (i.e., the unavoidable impacts) to the greater sage-grouse that may result from the proposed construction, maintenance, and operation of the Project. Mitigation will be required that provides a net conservation gain to the species and its habitat by following the mitigation hierarchy of avoiding, minimizing, and compensating for unavoidable residual impacts from development. The Mitigation Framework is available in Appendix F of BLM's ROD.

The Mitigation Framework is intended to facilitate Pacific Power's development of a *Greater Sage-Grouse Compensatory Mitigation Plan (CMP)*. With the development and implementation of the CMP, Pacific Power will be taking the necessary steps to compensate for the Project's residual impacts and to achieve net conservation gain for the species and its habitat. Net conservation gain will be achieved when mitigation results in an improvement above baseline conditions (i.e., when the magnitude of credits [benefits] are greater than the magnitude of the debits [impacts]).

The following are the overall objectives of this Mitigation Framework:

- Create a common understanding of the expectations that the authorizing agencies and wildlife agencies have for Pacific Power on the principles, standards, methods, timeframes, and other considerations that will guide the development of the CMP.
- Provide a methodology for assessing the adequacy of Pacific Power's CMP.

Pacific Power will use the Mitigation Framework in developing a Project-specific CMP proposal. The CMP will identify compensatory mitigation projects intended to offset the Project's residual impacts across all affected land ownerships and jurisdictions. Subject to each Federal, State, and local agency's determination that the CMP is sufficient and that its implementation is consistent with applicable laws and government policies, each agency may use the CMP in its environmental review documents and project authorizations. Since the CMP's overall success may be dependent on the successful implementation of each CMP mitigation project component, each agency would retain discretion to suspend or terminate its authorization in the event that any CMP mitigation project is not implemented successfully, regardless of that Project's location or jurisdictional considerations.

The Mitigation Framework has been cooperatively developed by the Project's Sage-Grouse Subgroup (see Appendix A in Appendix F of BLM's ROD). The

Mitigation Framework and Pacific Power's CMP apply only to the Vantage to Pomona Heights Transmission Line Project. Greater sage-grouse mitigation for JBLM YTC is guided by the *JBLM YTC Integrated Natural RMP, 2011 Fort Lewis Grow the Army Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Record of Decision* and other Federal and State greater sage-grouse mitigation and recovery documents.

The CMP will identify specific mitigation actions within the specified service areas. The CMP will demonstrate that mitigation actions are:

1. Available and on a scale that is ecologically meaningful to conservation.
2. Commensurate with the assessed impacts (debits).
3. Reasonably certain to be initiated within the timeframes established through the Federal and State permitting, ROWs, and other authorization processes.
4. Measureable and enforceable by the authorized agencies.
5. Consistent with the Compensatory Mitigation Principles and Technical Elements.

Approved mitigation actions that will be undertaken in the Project-specific service areas will be designed to (a) enhance, to a net conservation gain standard for the species and its habitat, the baseline condition of the habitat at the mitigation sites in order to compensate for the residual impacts (debits) that have been assessed for the proposed Project; (b) preserve and maintain the habitat and other ecological attributes required for effective mitigation within the mitigation sites for the life of the Project or the Project's residual impacts, whichever is greater; and (c) benefit Sage-Grouse from the landscape-scale perspective, with a particular focus on limiting factors for the species (e.g., connectivity zones or expansion areas).

Regulation 40 CFR § 1505.2(c) requires that a monitoring and enforcement program be adopted and summarized where applicable for any mitigation, and 40 CFR § 1505.3 provides for Federal agency monitoring to ensure that their decisions are carried out. Pacific Power shall implement mitigation and other conditions established in the FEIS and committed to as part of BLM's ROD with monitoring and enforcement by the appropriate authorizing entities. For land administered by Reclamation, Reclamation shall include appropriate conditions in ROW and license agreements.

A Project-specific environmental compliance management plan for construction and the monitoring of avoidance and minimization measures will be included in Pacific Power's Plan of Development (POD), which will be updated as new information and circumstances warrant. Monitoring of long-term, offsite, compensatory mitigation will be components of other mitigation plans, such as the Greater Sage-Grouse CMP and will be described within the specific plans.

Specific plans identified in the FEIS that will be included in Pacific Power's POD include Reclamation, Revegetation, and Monitoring Plan; Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Management Plan; Wildlife and Plant Protection and Conservation Measures Plan; Traffic and Transportation Management Plan; Fire Prevention and Control Protection Plan; Dust Control Plan; and Spill Prevention, Control, and Countermeasures Plan.

Pacific Power must obtain all ROWs, permits, and other permissions necessary to construct the NNR Alternative – Overhead Design Option from private landowners and governmental entities that have jurisdiction over the project (hereafter “Third-Party Approvals”). In the event that Pacific Power is unable to obtain all necessary Third-Party Approvals, the proposed Project will not move forward.

Reclamation will review the CMP and make a determination that the CMP is sufficient and that its implementation is consistent with applicable laws and government policies and does not preclude future development of proposed projects in the vicinity. Implementation of the CMP, as noted above, will be made a condition in Pacific Power's ROW and license agreements issued by Reclamation. Compliance with the Mitigation Framework will ensure that all practicable mitigation measures will be adopted. If mitigation is not practicable because of the possibility of future construction of Wymer Dam and Reservoir Project, then that mitigation will not be included, but an offset amount will be adopted.

The BLM prepared a biological assessment (BA) and submitted it to the Service and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA Fisheries) on December 2, 2016, in accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The BA found the Agency Preferred Alternative would have “no effect” on species protected under the ESA. The Service and NOAA Fisheries each provided electronic correspondence to BLM stating that they agree with the “no effect” determination. Required design features included in the BA would reduce any anticipated adverse impacts. Reclamation's grant of ROW and issuance of a license will require that Pacific Power complies with all reasonable and prudent measures and implementing terms and conditions listed in the BA.

The BLM, Reclamation, JBLM YTC, BPA, and the Washington State Historic Preservation Officer have prepared a programmatic agreement for the proposed Project that establishes procedures for identifying historical, archaeological, and cultural resources; evaluating their National Register eligibility; assessing effects; and implementing measures to avoid or mitigate adverse effects. The Section 106

of the National Historic Preservation Act process has been completed for the proposed Project with the execution of the PA.

Implementation

This decision shall be implemented after: (1) the licensee and the Washington State Departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife (State) jointly recommend in writing for incorporation into the license mitigation and enhancement measures that are consistent with the Vantage to Pomona Heights 230 kV Transmission Line Project FEIS Mitigation Framework, which, in the State's opinion, will not adversely impact the potential future mitigation that the State has preliminary identified for the Wymer Dam and Reservoir Project; (2) Reclamation determines, in writing, that the mitigation measures jointly recommended by the licensee and the State are feasible and appropriate; and (3) Reclamation notifies the licensee, in writing, that implementation of the mitigation measures has been made a condition of the license. Reclamation reserves the ability to modify the proposed mitigation measures as it deems appropriate to not preclude potential future projects. Nothing in this provision should be construed as granting the State or third parties the right to enforce this provision in any administrative or legal proceeding.

Approved:



Lorri J. Lee, Regional Director
Bureau of Reclamation, Pacific Northwest Region

3/9/17
Date