Department of Energy
Richland Operations Office
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DOE/EA-2038

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

REBUILD OF 12.6 MILES OF THE BENTON-OTHELLO SWITCHING STATION 115 KV ELECTRICAL TRANSMISSION LINE ON THE HANFORD SITE, WASHINGTON

AGENCY: U.S. Department of Energy

ACTION: Finding of No Significant Impact

SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) completed the *Environmental Assessment for the Rebuild of 12.6 Miles of the Benton-Othello Switching Station 115 kV Electrical Transmission Line, Hanford Site, Washington* (EA; DOE/EA-2038), which analyzed the potential environmental impacts of the Proposed Action. The proposal is to rebuild a deteriorating electrical transmission line, owned by Avista Corporation, to provide reliable electric power to Avista's customers.

In addition to the Proposed Action, the Environmental Assessments (EA) analyzed a No Action Alternative as required by DOE's NEPA regulations (10 CFR Part 1021). Based on the analyses in the Final EA, DOE determined that the Proposed Action would not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and DOE is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

PUBLIC AVAILABILITY AND CONTACT INFORMATION: The FONSI and the Final EA are available at:

- http://www.hanford.gov/page.cfm/EnvironmentalAssessments

- U.S. Department of Energy Public Reading Room
  Washington State University, Tri-Cities
  Consolidated Information Center, Room 101-L
  2770 University Drive
  Richland, WA 99352

For questions about this FONSI or EA:

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For information about the DOE NEPA process:

Office of NEPA Policy and Compliance
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, D.C. 20585
http://energy.gov/nepa/office-nepa-policy-and-compliance

PROPOSED ACTION: The Proposed Action is to rebuild 12.6 miles of the existing 115 kV electrical transmission line system on the Hanford Site. The proposal includes decommissioning and removing the deactivated system, and conducting operations and maintenance of the completed system. The Proposed Action would replace the components (conductors, hardware, and support structures), and improve long-term reliability of the system. The transmission line is within an existing easement, however, Avista requires temporary access roads and staging areas that are outside the easement, for which DOE would issue a realty instrument.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED: Under the No Action Alternative, the transmission line would continue operating as currently configured. Many of the structures, conductors, and other electrical hardware are in a deteriorating condition. Unplanned maintenance related to equipment failures have occurred and would be expected to occur in the future at an increased frequency.

Under the Proposed Action, Avista implemented design modifications and mitigation measures to reduce environmental impacts, which are described in the EA. The EA also describes implementation of Best Management Practices and other forms of mitigation to reduce, avoid, or compensate for potential environmental impacts. Operations and maintenance activities for the rebuilt system would be similar to those for the existing system, and would include surveillances, planned maintenance, and emergency repairs. However, because the rebuilt system would consist of new transmission system components, maintenance would be less than that on the existing system.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES: The EA considered potential environmental impacts to geology and soils; water resources; air quality and climate; biological resources; flooding and floodplains; wetlands; cultural resources and historic properties; land use; visual resources; noise; transportation; health and safety; utilities and infrastructure; waste management; socioeconomics and environmental justice; and also intentional destructive acts as required by DOE's NEPA guidance. The analysis in the EA is incorporated by reference. A summary is provided below.

Under the No Action Alternative, the impacts of the Proposed Action, to rebuild the deteriorating transmission system, would not occur. However, continued operation of the existing system in its current condition could result in the following potential environmental impacts:

- Risks of wildland fire caused by deteriorated electrical components
- Impacts to cultural, ecological, and visual resources by unplanned emergency repairs

Under the Proposed Action, impacts would occur to wetlands, the White Bluffs bladderpod and critical habitat, and cultural resources. Avista made alterations to its project design and construction methods to mitigate impacts to wetlands and other sensitive areas. Best management practices already in place at Hanford and identification of compensatory mitigation measures for ecological resources, consistent with the *Hanford Site Biological Resources Management Plan,* would further reduce potential impacts to ecological resources.

A Biological Evaluation was prepared for consultation under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. The US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS) determined the proposed action "May Affect and is Likely to Adversely Affect" White Bluffs bladderpod but there is no jeopardy to bladderpod and there would be no adverse modification of the critical habitat. Avista will also implement a Compensatory Mitigation Plan for the bladderpod in accordance with the USFWS's Biological Opinion.

Regarding potential impacts to cultural resources, consultation under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) was conducted, and a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was prepared to mitigate potential impacts of the Proposed Action. Mitigation of impacts on cultural and historic resources would be further accomplished by employing the management practices specified in Hanford Site policies, plans and procedures and in compliance with the *Hanford Cultural Resources Management Plan,* as appropriate. Construction activities would be monitored for potential inadvertent discovery of any cultural resources.

In performing its work, Avista will be responsible for complying with applicable regulatory requirements as well as implementation of mitigation measures identified in the EA, Biological Opinion, and MOA under NHPA, and included as conditions of DOE's realty instrument for the Benton-Othello electrical transmission line rebuild project.

DETERMINATION:

Based on the analysis in the EA, I have determined that the Proposed Action would not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, the preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and DOE is issuing this FONSI.

Issued in Richland, Washington, this 28th day of July 2019.

Brian T. Vance
Manager