6450-01-P

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Western Area Power Administration

Record Of Decision for the Interconnection of the Griffith Power Plant with the Western Area Power Administration's Parker-Davis and Pacific Northwest-Pacific Southwest Intertie Transmission Systems (DOE/EIS-0297)

AGENCY: Western Area Power Administration, DOE.

ACTION: Record of Decision.

SUMMARY: Griffith Energy Limited Liability Corporation (Griffith) applied for transmission service from the Western Area Power Administration (Western) for the Griffith Energy Project (Project). Based on the application, Western proposed to enter into an interconnection and construction agreement with Griffith to provide interconnections with Western's Pacific Northwest-Pacific Southwest Intertie and Parker-Davis transmission systems. Western has decided to enter into interconnection and construction agreements with Griffith to provide the interconnections with Western's Pacific Northwest-Pacific Southwest Intertie and Parker-Davis transmission systems, and to construct and operate transmission system additions to provide the interconnection with its transmission system. The interconnection to Western's transmission system will be provided via two new 230-kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, a new 230-/345-kV substation, and the upgrading of the existing Davis-Prescott 230-kV transmission line. Western's decision for its action took into consideration the environmental ramifications of the Project. The environmental ramifications of the Project were addressed in Western's Griffith Energy Project Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements (DOE/EIS-0297). This Record of Decision (ROD) has been prepared in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (40 CFR parts 1500-1508) and Department of Energy (DOE) Procedures for Implementing NEPA (10 CFR part 1021), and DOE's Floodplain/Wetland Review Requirements (10 CFR 1022). Western will reconsider this decision if Griffith does not obtain a Prevention of Significant Deterioration (PSD) air permit from the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ). Full implementation of this decision is contingent upon the Project obtaining all other required permits and approvals.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Mr. John Holt, Environmental Manager, Desert Southwest Customer Service Region, Western Area Power Administration,

P.O. Box 6457, Phoenix, AZ 85005, telephone (602) 352-2592, email holt@wapa.gov. Copies of the Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) are available from Mr. Holt.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Western is the lead agency for the EIS and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Kingman Field Office (BLM) is a cooperating agency. Western decided to enter into interconnection and construction agreements with Griffith, and to construct and operate transmission system additions to provide the interconnection with its transmission system. The transmission system additions include:

1. A new 8-mile 230-kV transmission line from the Griffith Power Plant to Western's existing McConnico Substation along route segments A and D as defined in the EIS;

2. A new 230-/345-kV substation, named Peacock Substation, at the intersection of the existing Davis-Prescott and Mead-Phoenix transmission lines in the northeast corner of Section 36, Township 22 North, Range 14 West;

3. A new 30.2-mile 230-kV transmission line from the Griffith Power Plant to the new substation along route segments A, B and C as defined in the EIS (segments A and B will utilize a right-of-way previously acquired by Citizen's Utilities for its Kingman-Havasu project);

4. The installation of new electrical equipment and structures within the boundaries of Western's existing McConnico and Mead substations; and

5. The tensioning of existing conductors and/or installation of new conductors on the existing Davis-Prescott 230-kV transmission line between Western's Davis Substation and the new Peacock Substation (segment Z as defined in the EIS), including the installation of new structures between some longer spans to support the conductor.

The transmission lines will be constructed along Western's preferred alternative as described in the EIS. In addition, Western decided to utilize single-pole steel structures for the portions of the new transmission lines that cross State- and privately-owned lands. Across BLM-administered public lands, Western will utilize the structure type stipulated by BLM in its rights-of-way grant.

Western based its decision on the information contained in the Griffith Energy Project EIS (DOE/EIS-0297; Draft EIS issued October 1998 and Final issued March 1999), subsequent comments received during the Final EIS waiting period, and consultations with the BLM.

Alternatives Considered

Western considered the transmission alternatives addressed in the EIS and the environmental ramifications of the Griffith Power Plant in reaching its decision. Transmission alternatives included system, routing, and structure alternatives, and the no action alternative. Transmission line routing alternatives considered in the EIS were limited by the proximity of the Project to an established utility corridor, and the presence of other Western facilities in the area. Western did not select a routing alternative directly north of the power plant (segments A and E as defined in the EIS) because of its proximity to Walnut Creek Estates. Another routing alternative for segment D was suggested, but it was not technically feasible. Steel lattice, H-frame, and single-pole structure alternatives were considered for the transmission lines. The environmental impacts for each structure type will be similar. Due to cost and engineering considerations, Western selected the single-pole structure for the new lines and the H-frame structures for installation between the longer spans on the existing line. Single pole structures will not be feasible for the Davis-Peacock upgrade due to the horizontal configuration of the existing line. System alternatives were also addressed, but dismissed from full analysis.

The no action alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. It was not selected because it will not satisfy Western's need to provide access to its transmission system when requested by an eligible organization. Western implemented an Open Access Transmission Tariff to meet the intent of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Order for Open Transmission Access (FERC Order Nos. 888 and 888-A). The no action alternative also will not provide enhancements to the transmission system in northwestern Arizona, or extend the life of the existing Davis-Prescott transmission line.

Western believes that the selection of the no action alternative would not necessarily preclude development of the Griffith Power Plant, as Griffith could pursue other options or appeal a Western denial. Existing transmission constraints in the Kingman area have been well documented. If Griffith decides not to develop the Project under the no action alternative, it is believed that Citizen's Utilities would reinitiate its Kingman-Havasu transmission line project and pursue development of its own power plant to meet future electrical loads in the Kingman area. With development of the Project, Citizen's Utilities is not expected to construct a new 230-kV transmission line north of the Griffith Power Plant.

In addition to the transmission system additions, the Project has other components that include the power plant, a brine disposal pond, gas pipelines, a power plant access road, an equipment off-loading area, a temporary haul route, water wells, and a water pipeline. Western does not have any jurisdiction over these components of the project. The BLM has jurisdiction over the eastern gas pipeline and will be issuing a separate ROD for the pipeline and the transmission lines that cross BLM-administered public lands. Western did consider the environmental ramifications of the entire Project in its decision making. Western has determined that the development of the gas pipelines, access road, temporary equipment off-loading, and haul road will not have significant environmental impacts based on the mitigation measures included in the EIS. The significance of the environmental impacts of the other Project components are discussed below.

Additional comments were received during the Final EIS waiting period that expressed concerns about water use and depletion, water use alternatives, Mohave County's authorization of the water supply for the Project, and cumulative impacts. Western's decision considered water resource impacts based on an average annual consumption rate of 3,300 gallons per minute over a 40-year life of the project. The water balance analysis in the Final EIS addressed water consumption rather than water supply. The water consumption analysis is a more accurate representation of the Project's impacts on the Sacramento water basin. Considering the water balance analysis and the highest possible estimates used to address cumulative water withdrawal impacts, Western believes the Final EIS more than adequately represents potential cumulative water consumption impacts. Western determined that the water consumption impacts will be adverse, but not significant.

Western's decision also considered action taken by the Arizona Corporation Commission which issued a Certificate for Environmental Compatibility with conditions related to water use. The conditions will help the State monitor the Project's impact on groundwater resources. The power plant design incorporates equipment to recycle waste water and minimize water use. The EIS addressed alternatives to reduce water consumption by the power plant, but these alternatives were not economically feasible and were dismissed from full analysis. Two additional methods were suggested to reduce water depletion during the Final EIS waiting period that are consistent with the alternatives dismissed. Two more methods were suggested, but were outside the scope defined for the EIS during scoping.

Western's decision also took into consideration the potential impacts of the brine disposal pond. In response to comments received on the Draft EIS, Western worked with Griffith to add monitoring and reporting of any waterfowl use and problems with the brine disposal pond. With monitoring and reporting, Western will be able to address any impacts to waterfowl with State and Federal wildlife agencies. In addition, Western based its decision on Griffith's need to obtain an aquifer protection permit from ADEQ for the brine disposal pond. The permit will adequately address concerns expressed about the pond to Western during the Final EIS waiting period.

Western's decision also considered the Project's impacts on regional haze. Based on a review of the additional analysis on the Project's impacts on Grand Canyon visibility, Western concurs with the results that the Project will not have an adverse impact on Grand Canyon or Hualapai Tribe visibility. This ROD will be reconsidered if the ADEQ denies Griffith a PSD permit for the project.

Mitigation Measures

All practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from Western's selected alternative have been adopted. The generic and selective mitigation measures adopted are given in Table 2.1-4 of the Final EIS. Specific mitigation that applies to the construction of the new transmission lines, and the upgrading of the existing transmission line is identified in the EIS. This mitigation includes:

1. A desert tortoise mitigation plan which will include preconstruction surveys and compensation for unmitigated impacts;

2. Hualapai tribal participation in the intensive cultural resource surveys for the new transmission lines and the upgrade of the existing Davis-Peacock line;

3. In locations identified during cultural resource inventory as having the potential to contain sensitive cultural resources to the Hualapai Tribe, Hualapai representatives will be invited to monitor right-of-way blading and construction;

4. New conductors and groundwires will be nonspecular and when existing conductors are replaced, nonspecular conductors will be used to reduce visual impacts;

5. New transmission line structures will be dulled to reduce visual impacts;

6. Transmission line structures would be designed for the appropriate seismic zone;

7. Third-party construction monitoring in areas identified by the BLM;

8. Reseeding and plant salvaging per a BLM approved Reclamation Operation Maintenance Plan;

9. Preconstruction surveys for peregrine falcon and other raptor nesting activity;

10. Avoidance of construction during any discovered mountain plover breeding season; and

11. Coordination with interested property owners on structure siting to reduce land use and visual impacts.

The decision also is based on the implementation of specific mitigation measures identified in the EIS for the other components of the Project including:

1. Western's review and approval of dust control procedures for the construction of the Griffith Power Plant as required by the ADEQ air permit;

2. Power plant lighting compliance with Mohave County illumination ordinances and use of partially- or fully-shielded fixtures during darkness;

3. Painting plant with colors similar to the surrounding landscape; and

4. Monitoring and reporting of waterfowl use and impacts at the brine disposal pond.

A Mitigation Action Plan will be developed in accordance with 10 CFR 1021.331 that addresses mitigation commitments described above. The Mitigation Action Plan will explain how the mitigation will be planned and implemented and will be available upon request.

Dated:

Michael S. Hacskaylo

Administrator