

**FINAL
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND DECISION RECORD**

Proposal: Public Service of New Mexico (PNM) has applied to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for an amendment to an existing right-of-way in order to upgrade a 115 kV transmission electrical transmission line and widen the existing right-of-way; and for authorization to include fiber optic line with the new transmission line. The transmission line upgrade with the new fiber optic line would cross public lands managed by the BLM northwest of Santa Fe, New Mexico. The upgraded transmission line and fiber optic line on public lands managed by BLM are part of a larger proposal to upgrade and enhance the electrical transmission system for the cities of Santa Fe and Las Vegas, New Mexico.

PNM's technical studies show that the existing transmission line system serving the area is reaching the limits of its load capacity, which would leave the area vulnerable to electrical system problems if there were a loss of a transmission line or other critical piece of equipment. Without this transmission line upgrade, studies have indicated that the Santa Fe/Las Vegas electrical system could experience serious problems as early as winter 2003-2004. With the increased loads that are expected on the system over the next several years, the risk of problems will also increase.

The BLM portion of the project lies in the Buckman area northwest of Santa Fe, originating at PNM's existing Norton substation and continuing south and southeast, utilizing either of two existing power line corridors, for approximately 5.5 miles to the BLM boundary. Outside of the BLM boundary, the power line with fiber optic line will continue across private lands and lands under the jurisdictions of the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, and the State of New Mexico.

Decision to Be Made: The BLM only has the authority to make decisions regarding lands and resources managed by the BLM. Therefore, the decision to be made by BLM is whether or not the BLM will (1) Authorize an amendment to the existing right-of-way to accommodate upgrades to the 115 kV transmission line and widening of the right-of-way, and (2) Authorize addition of fiber optic line to the transmission line corridor. The decision will also address the location of and conditions under which these activities would be authorized.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for this project as required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) provides the analytical basis for BLM to make a decision for BLM lands and resources. The EA will also provide important information to PNM, the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, the State of New Mexico, and private citizens for making subsequent decisions regarding routes and facilities on lands within their jurisdictions and ownership.

Actions Connected to the Proposal Outside of this BLM Decision: Actions connected to this proposal but outside BLM's jurisdiction include determining the route of the 115 kV transmission line and fiber optic cable replacing poles and lines, widening the right-of-way in some areas, and retro-fitting or constructing a new switching station. PNM has stated that they will continue to work with the other jurisdictional entities and private citizens to make decision regarding these potential activities.

Finding of No Significant Impacts: A thorough analysis of environmental impacts has been conducted and those impacts have been disclosed in the EA. Based on the analysis of the environmental assessment, I have determined that the potential impacts of the proposed action are not expected to be significant and an environmental impact statement is not required.

Public and Agency Review and Comment:

Comments from the Village of Agua Fria Planning Committee and the Agua Fria Village Association meeting held on May 3, 2004.

Results were:

8 individuals preferred Option A

4 individuals preferred Option S

1 individual opposed Option A

1 individual opposed Option O

7 individuals indicated there should not be a switching station or substation in Agua Fria

Letter from Department of Game and Fish

- provided recommendations to minimize or eliminate impacts to wildlife (these included 2003 powerline project guidelines and 2003 trenching guidelines)

Letter from Warren Thompson, president of one of the general partners of Rancho Viejo Limited Partnership. Addressed to PNM, in response to their request for an easement for the powerline. Concerns with:

- visual impact on the current natural grassland landscape;
- possible negative impact to future development of their property;
- would require lines be buried at no expense to the Partnership and at a location acceptable to the Partnership;
- urge PNM to use other, already existing corridors;

Letter from Isaac Pino, Vice President and General Manager Rancho Viejo de Santa Fe Inc. Exact same letter as above, same concerns.

Comment from William H. Mee.

As a resident of and public servant of the Village of Agua Fria, citizens want:

- respect of the Traditional Historic Community boundaries;
- preservation of Cultural Land Use Patterns;
- prohibition of substations or switching stations in residential areas; and
- scenic preservation of the village.

Decision: It is my decision to select both action alternatives (BLM portions of alternatives A, F, O, and S) for potential implementation. While I am authorizing either of the two routes on BLM to be authorized, only one route on BLM lands will ultimately be used. Once a route off BLM lands has been selected, the BLM will review and authorize PNM's updated applications for that connected route across BLM lands. Therefore, BLM will authorize upgrades to the 115 kV transmission line, addition of fiber optic cable, and widening of the existing right-of-way for one of the two routes across BLM lands. I understand that PNM has committed to continue working with private citizens, the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, and the State of New Mexico to identify the best possible route across those jurisdictions.

A map showing the two routes on BLM lands is provided on Map 2-1 in the attached EA.

Rationale for Decision: My decision to authorize these activities is based on the following rationale:

- The activities within the selected alternatives are in conformance with the Taos Resource Management Plan (1988) and BLM policy and guidance.
- The major resource issues identified through BLM interdisciplinary review have been addressed in the analysis and considered in the decision. Based on the analysis in the EA, the impacts of the activities to be authorized are not expected to be significant.
- There are no adverse impacts to federally listed threatened or endangered plant or animal species or to cultural resources.
- This project is planned and designed to address current and future critical electrical transmission reliability and capacity problems for the cities of Santa Fe and Las Vegas. Preparation of the EA and this first phase decision by BLM facilitates continued discussion and planning for routing the line off BLM lands. In addition, this BLM decision allows the other jurisdictions to move forward in their analysis of routes without precluding selection of any of the four routes in their jurisdictions that are analyzed in detail in the EA.

Additional Information:

A discussion of rangeland resources and grazing was inadvertently omitted from the EA sent out for public review and comment. That discussion has been incorporated into the final EA that is available with the Decision Record and FONSI. The possible effects on rangeland resources and grazing from implementation of all action alternatives are similar or the same.

This Decision pertains to BLM lands and resources only. The EA has been prepared to facilitate its use by the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, State Land Office, and PNM in

determining where, how and when the transmission facilities should be continued onto non-BLM lands.

If you wish to obtain a paper copy of the final EA, please contact Lora Yonemoto, Taos Field Office, 226 Cruz Alta Rd., Taos, NM 87571, or at (505) 751-4709.



Sam DesGeorges
Acting Taos Field Office Manager

6/3/2004

Date