

Mason Valley to Smith Valley Transmission Right-of-Way Project

PUBLIC SCOPING

DOI-BLM-NV-C020-2015-0029-EA

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
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BLM Seeks Input on the Mason Valley to Smith Valley Transmission Right-of-Way Project

Introduction. In November 2014, Sierra Pacific Power Company dba NV Energy (NV Energy) submitted to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Sierra Front Field Office in Carson City, Nevada a right-of-way (ROW) amendment application. The application and draft Plan of Development (POD) details the need for the *Mason Valley to Smith Valley Transmission Right-of-Way Project*.

NV Energy identified the need to improve voltage support and customer reliability for Smith Valley, and to replace two aging substations, the Bridge Street and Anaconda substations, with a modern substation (Mason Substation) in order to meet modern electrical safety standards and improve customer service and reliability.

In order to fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and National Historic Preservation Act, an environmental assessment to evaluate the potential effects from the project would be prepared by the BLM. The environmental assessment would be available for public review in the winter 2015.

An environmental assessment is intended to be an overview of environmental concerns, not an exhaustive study of all environmental issues.

In preparing their application and draft POD, NV Energy has described the features of the project as follows:

- Three existing 60 kV transmission lines would be connected to three new 60 kV lines west of Weed Heights. The lines would run for approximately 2.4 miles south to the new Mason Substation. One line would support a single circuit and a second line would support two circuits;
- A new Mason Substation would be constructed;
- The existing 17-mile Smith Valley 25 kV line would be rebuilt for operation at 60 kV (with a capacity of 120 kV) from the Mason Substation to the Smith Valley Substation;
- The existing Smith Valley Switching Station would be rebuilt as the Smith Valley Substation to receive the incoming transmission line and connected to the three existing distribution circuits serving the Smith Valley and Topaz Ranch Estates area;
- The Anaconda Substation would be decommissioned and removed;
- The Bridge Street Substation would be decommissioned and removed;
- A short distribution circuit (Mason 205) would be constructed from the Mason Substation would connect to the nearby existing 205 distribution circuit;
- Along the Mason 205/208 distribution feeder there would be pole replacement or circuit reconfiguration;
- Along the Mason 204/208 distribution feeder, a new double circuit distribution would tie into existing distribution circuits. This would replace a portion of an existing 25 kV (206) distribution line; and

- Three 60 kV transmission lines that share a narrow corridor from the start of the proposed Mason transmission lines to the Anaconda Substation would be removed.

Purpose and Need. The BLM's purpose and need is to respond to the ROW amendment application and draft POD. The BLM could either approve, modify, or reject the Project.

Land Use Conformance. The Project is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (CRMP), May 2001, page LND-7, RMP Administrative Actions, #6:

- "Exchanges and minor-non Bureau initiated realty proposals will be considered where analysis indicates they are beneficial to the public.

Alternatives. The BLM would evaluate, at a minimum, a No Action Alternative, which would not authorize the Project, and a Proposed Action, which would authorize the Project. Additional alternatives may be analyzed based on input from public scoping.

Issues Identification. On June 29, 2015, a BLM interdisciplinary team reviewed this Project and on July 7, 2015 participated in a field visit to the Project area. Issues that were raised included:

- What would be the visual impacts to the areas west of Weed Heights?
- If archeological sites are located within the disturbance area, how would mitigation measures be addressed?
- Would there be impacts to public access or grazing operations?

This 15-day scoping period is from July 20 until August 3, 2015.

For more information contact Brian L. Buttazoni, Planning and Environmental Coordinator at: 775-885-6004 or by email at: MasonSmithEA@blm.gov

Resources Considered for Analysis

The following resources were considered during an internal interdisciplinary team meeting on this proposal held on June 29, 2015. Based on that review, resources *present* and *may be affected* by this proposal would be analyzed in the upcoming draft EA.

Category I, Supplemental Authorities.

Resource	Present Yes/No	Affected Yes/No	Rationale
Air Quality	Y	N	Although the Project area is within the Lyon County air basin, which is in attainment status. During construction activities there would be negligible emissions from motor vehicles and equipment, and fugitive dust (particulates). These negligible increases in emissions and particulates would be minimized by implementation of best management practices. Maintenance activities over the long-term would also contribute to negligible increases in emissions and particulates.
Areas of Critical Environmental Concern	N		Resource not present.
Cultural Resources	??		To be determined. The Project area is currently undergoing a class III cultural resources inventory to determine whether archeological sites would potentially be affected by the Project.
Environmental Justice	N		Resource not present.
Farm Lands (prime or unique)	N		Resource not present.
Floodplains	N		Resource not present.
Invasive and Noxious Weeds	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Migratory Birds	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Native American Religious Concerns	??		To be determined. Consultation with the Yerington Paiute Tribe has been initiated. Coordination would continue with the tribe as this Project is analyzed.
Threatened or Endangered Species	N		Resource not present.
Wastes, Hazardous or Solid	N		Resource not present.
Water Quality (Surface/Ground)	Y	N	Surface water resources would not be affected through implementation of avoidance and best management practices.
Wetlands/Riparian Zones	Y	N	Surface water resources would not be affected through implementation of avoidance and best management practices.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	N		Resource not present.
Wilderness/WSA	N		Resource not present.

Category II, Other Resources.

Resource or Issue**	Present Yes/No	Affected Yes/No	Rationale
BLM Sensitive Species (animals)	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
BLM Sensitive Species (plants)	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Fire Management	N		Resource not present.
Forest Resources	N		Resource not present.
General Wildlife	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Land Use Authorization	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Lands with Wilderness Characteristics	N		Resource not present.
Livestock Grazing	Y	N	Although the Hudson Hills Grazing Allotment overlaps the Project area, there would be no effect to grazing operations by the construction transmission line and maintenance activities.
Minerals	Y	N	Exploration activities are not presently occurring in the Project area. Coordination with the on-going Ludwig Mine development on private lands would occur to ensure Project construction activities do not affect that operation.
Paleontological	N		Resource not present.
Recreation	Y	N	Although dispersed recreational activities occur throughout the Project area, construction and long-term maintenance activities would not affect these uses.
Socioeconomics	N		Resource not present.
Soils	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Travel Management	Y	N	Construction and maintenance activities would not affect public access through the Project area.
Vegetation	Y	Y	This resource would be analyzed in the draft environmental assessment.
Visual Resources	Y	Y	The Visual Resource Management (VRM) designation for the Project area is presently "unclassified." Under the ongoing land use plan revision, the proposed classification is VRM class IV which allows for major changes to the visual character of the landscape. This Project would be consistent with that designation.
Wild Horses and Burros	N		Resource not present.