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DOE/EA-1470

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY
Western Area Power Administration
Finding of No Significant Impact and
Floodplain Statement of Findings
Nevada Power Company's
Harry Allen-Mead 500-kV Transmission Line Project

Summary – Nevada Power Company (Nevada Power) proposes to build a 48-mile, 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the Harry Allen Substation, northeast of Las Vegas Nevada, and the Mead Substation, southeast of Las Vegas (Proposed Action). The project would be part of the Interstate Intertie of the Centennial Plan. Of the 48 miles, 32 miles are within lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), 8 miles are within lands managed by the US Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), and 4 miles are within lands managed by Western Area Power Administration (Western). The BLM was the Lead Agency in preparing the environmental assessment (EA) and Western and USBR were cooperating agencies. A number of environmental protection measures are included with the proposed action to minimize potential adverse environmental effects.

The availability of the environmental assessment (EA) entitled, Interstate Intertie Centennial Plan Environmental Assessment, Harry Allen-Mead 500-kV Transmission Line Project, (DOE/EA-1470) was distributed to the public March 4, 2004. The BLM responded to comments and prepared corrections and amendments in the form of an erratum, dated May 26, 2004.

Western proposed to authorize construction of the transmission line across the lands it manages and enter into construction and interconnection agreements with Nevada Power for interconnecting the transmission line at Western's Mead Substation. Western has adopted the BLM EA and EA erratum for its proposed action. On September 23, 2004, NPC made a decision to modify the Proposed Action to include a minor route alternative, which would avoid a line crossing near the Mead Substation. Western prepared an erratum to describe the change and effects of this reroute. Based on the EA, BLM, and Western errata, Western has determined that the proposed transmission line would not result in any significant environmental impacts, and the preparation of an environmental impact statement (EIS) will not be required. The basis for this determination is described in this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

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Additional information and copies of the FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public from the person named above. Additional copies of the EA are available through the BLM contact:

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Purpose and Need – Nevada Power has a need to increase transmission capacity between its Harry Allen Substation and Western's Mead Substation. The increased transmission capacity would meet several purposes that include:

- Providing greater reliability and capacity for Nevada Power's transmission system
- Increasing the ability to distribute available power to meet existing and future demands
- Meeting Nevada Power's contractual obligation for transmission with various power producers
- Increasing Nevada Power's ability to import power to meet growing electrical demand in the Las Vegas area

Western has the need to respond to Nevada Power's application for crossing lands in its jurisdiction and Nevada Power's two applications for interconnection to the Federal power system, and to ensure reliability of the Federal power system.

Project Description – Nevada Power proposes to build 48-miles of new 500-kV transmission line east of the greater Las Vegas area between the Harry Allen Substation and Western's Mead Substation. Of the 48 miles, 32 miles are within

lands managed by the BLM, 8 miles are within lands managed by the USBR, 4 miles are within lands managed by Western and 4 miles are on private land.

Western proposed to authorize construction of the transmission line across the lands it manages and enter into construction and interconnection agreements with Nevada Power for interconnection the transmission line at Western's Mead Substation. As part of the 500-kV interconnection at Mead Substation, Western would install five new circuit breakers, disconnecting switches, bus tubing and conductors, and desert tortoise-proof fencing.

Construction activities for the proposed transmission line would include installation of self-supporting steel lattice towers for the majority of the distance. However in several instances, steel poles would be used where specific engineering design is needed to meet conductor clearance requirements and for approximately 1-1/2 miles near Lake Las Vegas to accommodate the landowner's request.

Single-circuit structures would be used for the length of the project except for approximately 18 miles, where double circuit structures would be installed. Tower heights would be 125 to 190 feet, depending on location and terrain.

Surface access would be required to each transmission structure. Because the Proposed Action falls mostly within a transmission corridor, existing transmission line access roads are readily available and would be utilized wherever practical, thus keeping new access roads to a minimum. Existing roads may need maintenance or upgrades, involving clearing overgrown vegetation, regrading and/or installation of drainage structures. Approximately one mile of new or improved road would be required for each mile of transmission line where no access roads currently exist.

The Public Process -- To allow an early and open process for determining the scope of issues and concerns related to the proposed action (40 CFR 1501.7), public scoping was provided by BLM, Western, and USBR. BLM and the cooperating agencies invited comments in a letter and through a local public notice. A scoping meeting was held April 2, 2003, in Henderson, Nevada. In a letter dated March 4, 2004, and local public notice, BLM notified Federal and state agencies, tribes and affected landowners about the availability of the EA. These notices included Notice of Floodplain Involvement to comply with DOE's requirements under 10 CFR part 1022. The EA was distributed to all requestors for review and comment. BLM responded directly to specific comments received on the EA. BLM published an erratum to the EA, which is considered in this determination on whether or not to prepare an EIS. BLM's erratum and FONSI were distributed August 10, 2004.

Under BLM's lead, Western has met its obligations under the Endangered Species Act (7 U.S.C. 136; 16 U.S.C. 460 et seq., 1973), and the National Historic

Preservation Act (NHPA, 16 U.S.C. 470 et seq., 2000). Additionally, Western sent letters to tribes, dated August 21, 2003, to meet its Native American consultation requirements. Western and BLM's representative met with one tribe on September 24, 2003, in response to the tribe's request for a meeting.

Alternatives -- DOE's NEPA regulations require that an EA include a discussion of the no action alternative (10 CFR 1021.321(c)). Under the no action alternative, the proposed action would not be implemented. Facilities to increase transmission capacity would not be constructed.

Environmental Impacts -- Western's conclusions about the Proposed Action's environmental impacts are based on information contained in the EA issued in March 2004 and EA errata issued by BLM and Western. The EA and EA errata are available upon request. In reaching conclusions about the proposed project's environmental impacts, Western has considered the Proposed Action, including Nevada Power's management practices proposed as part of the project, and significance criteria developed for the Ivanpah Energy Center environmental impact statement (DOE/EIS-0354) that addresses another interconnection request at Mead Substation.

The existing environment and the potential environmental impacts were identified and evaluated for the following resources:

- Biological (botanical, noxious weeds, wildlife, and special-status species)
- Air
- Visual
- Cultural and Ethnographic
- Land use
- Socioeconomics
- Public Safety (electric and magnetic fields and hazardous materials)
- Water
- Geology and Soils
- Paleontological Resources

Based on an independent evaluation of the EA and errata, Western has concluded that, with the management practices proposed for the Proposed Action, the construction and operation of the proposed Harry Allen-Mead Transmission Line Project would not result in any significant environmental impacts to air, visual, land use, water, geology, and soil resources, socioeconomics, and public safety. Western has concluded that mitigation, beyond Nevada Power's management practices, is needed to render potentially significant impacts to biological, cultural, and paleontological resources insignificant. This mitigation is summarized in this FONSI and, if under Western's jurisdiction, addressed in Western's Mitigation Action Plan (MAP) issued concurrently with this FONSI. The MAP is available upon request. The basis for these conclusions is summarized below.

Biological Resources.

Western has determined that a significant impact to biological resources could occur if there was a:

- Loss of a unique biological community.
- Impacts to Category A or B desert tortoise habitat density areas.
- Reduction of a plant or animal community/population that would severely jeopardize the continued existence of such a plant or animal community/population.
- Introduction of noxious weeds to a presently uninfested area.
- Violation of the Endangered Species Act, the Bald Eagle Protection Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, or Nevada State Law.
- Substantial interference with the movement or nesting of migratory species.

Threatened, Endangered, and Candidate Wildlife Species. Several Federally-listed threatened, endangered, and candidate wildlife species are known or have potential to occur within the project area. These include the desert tortoise, southwestern willow flycatcher, Yuma clapper rail, and western yellow-billed cuckoo. A biological assessment was prepared to address impacts to these species as a result of the construction, operation, or maintenance of the Proposed Action. United States Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have rendered a Biological Opinion (BO) concurring with the following BLM determinations of effect to the species.

Desert Tortoise. The Proposed Action may affect and is likely to adversely affect desert tortoise, but it is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of this listed species. This determination is based on the evaluation of potential adverse effects of the Proposed Action and the application of mitigation measures as determined by FWS in the BO. Western has determined that with the implementation of the mitigation outlined in the BO, no significant impact to the desert tortoise would occur. These measures have been incorporated into Western's MAP and will be applied within Western's jurisdiction.

Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, Yuma Clapper Rail, and Western Yellow-billed Cuckoo. The Proposed Action may affect but is not likely to adversely southwestern willow flycatcher, the Yuma clapper rail, and the western yellow-billed cuckoo, or their preferred habitat. This determination is based on the application of mitigation measures presented in the EA and BO, spanning of the transmission line over the Las Vegas Was riparian corridor, the timing of the construction outside of the breeding/nesting period, the minimal amount of potentially suitable habitat available within the study area and lack of these species being found within the study area during surveys. The measures would be implemented for the Proposed Action, but are outside of areas under Western's jurisdiction.

Species of Concern. Additional species listed by FWS as "species of concern" could also occur within the project area. The BLM, Nevada Division of Wildlife (NDOW) and the Multi Species Habitat Conservation Plan also identified species that are sensitive or protected in Nevada, which could occur in the project area. This includes two species of reptiles (chuckwalla and banded Gila monster), one amphibian (arroyo southwestern toad), 13 bird species, two big game species (desert bighorn sheep and mule deer), and 12 species of bats.

Chuckwallas and Gila monsters would be affected by the Proposed Action due to temporary habitat loss. However, the effects would not be significant due to the implementation of the measures set forth in the EA. Western has incorporated these measures in its MAP. Impacts to arroyo southwestern toad would not occur, because important habitat features for these species are not present in the project area.

Ferruginous hawks and bald eagles mainly pass through the area during migration. The distance between phase conductors, or groundwires and energized conductors are greater than the wingspan of the largest raptor species know to this area, the golden eagle. As a result, no significant impacts to these raptor species are expected.

There is a possibility that bird collisions with the transmission lines could occur, especially where migratory routes and communication flyways are crossed by the lines, resulting in a significant impact due to a violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act. The existence of two other parallel transmission lines in the project corridor provides some immediate protection as local, resident birds would already be conditioned to avoid the area. Collisions would be further prevented by ensuring the visibility of the conductors because of bundled design. If any portions of the line cause mortalities, Nevada Power would work with FWS to determine appropriate mitigation. As a result, no significant impacts are expected.

Potential impacts to the western burrowing owl include loss of habitat and, since this is a ground-nesting bird, could include disturbance of breeding birds. Loss of individual burrowing owls including young and other ground nesting migratory birds is possible if construction occurs during the breeding season. Prior to construction, areas would be surveyed for nesting birds. Any nests would be avoided by use of a FWS- and Western-approved buffer until the young fledge. As a result, no significant impacts to burrowing owls and nesting migratory birds are expected.

About 3.2 acres of desert bighorn sheep habitat would be disturbed on lands under Western's jurisdiction. Desert bighorn sheep may react to increased human activity during construction. However, construction activities would occur where desert bighorn are habituated to humans and are accustomed to human activities. Any effects to this species during construction would be immediate and would not likely have a residual, adverse effect. As a result, no significant impacts to bighorn sheep would be expected.

Impacts to bat species would be negligible, because important habitat features for these species are not present in the project area.

Botanical Resources. While no Federally-listed threatened, endangered or candidate plant species occur in the project area, there are 14 species of concern that may occur in the project area. Several of these species are associated with gypsiferous soils, including Las Vegas bearpoppy, sticky ringstem, and Las Vegas buckwheat. Permanent impacts to approximately 20 acres of land with gypsum soil characteristics are expected to occur during construction of the Proposed Action on lands under Western's jurisdiction. Another 17 acres of temporary disturbance would also occur. Impacts would be limited as a result of construction occurring primarily within an existing utility corridor with the extensive use of existing access roads.

Where impacts to botanical resources are possible as a result of construction, operation, or maintenance of the Proposed Action, implementation of mitigation measures would prevent the loss of unique biological communities. Therefore, no significant impacts to these species are expected. The mitigation measures have been incorporated into Western's MAP.

Cactus and yucca are present in the project area and are protected under the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS 527.260-.300) and Nevada Administrative Code 527. These statutes are designed to minimize the loss of individual plants and populations of desert plants to construction activities and when implemented would result in less than significant impacts to cactus and yucca.

Noxious Weeds. Cheat grass, red brome, tall whitetop and Sahara mustard are known noxious weeds occurring throughout the plan area and most parts of Southern Nevada. Nevada Power's management practices address noxious weed control. BLM's plan of development (POD) will address noxious weed control and Western will ensure that noxious weed control measures are implemented on lands under Western's jurisdiction. Therefore, noxious weeds are not expected to be introduced to a presently unaffected area, avoiding a significant impact.

Considering the management practices and the mitigation measures, Western has concluded that the Proposed Action would not cause a loss of a unique biological community, jeopardize the continued existence of the desert tortoise or other plant or animal community/population, introduce noxious weeds to presently uninfested areas, violate the ESA, the Bald Eagle Protection Act, or the MBTA, or substantial interfere with the movement or nesting of migratory species. Therefore, there would not be any direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to biological resources from the Proposed Action.

Air Quality.

A significant impact to air quality could occur with a violation of ambient air quality standards. Construction impacts to air quality could be expected during each phase of

transmission line installation. The emissions produced during grading and construction activities, are, by their nature, of short-term duration and cease upon completion of project build-out. Dust emissions would conform to Federal, state, and county statutes ensuring a less than significant impact to air quality. Dust would be controlled during construction by spraying water on surfaces as needed. Principal air resource impacts associated with the operational phase of the transmission system are not significant to regional air quality degradation. As a result, Western has concluded that no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to air quality would occur from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Visual Resources.

A significant impact to visual resources could occur if there were any conflicts with Visual Resource Management (VRM) directives as stated in BLM's Resource Management Plan (RMP), or from an inability to mitigate visual impacts as required in each VRM class. The Proposed Action passes steep mountains and canyons in the northern section, while the project's central and southern portion is composed of a series of washes and ravines with areas of large, relatively flat bajadas. Multiple transmission lines and accompanying access roads bisect the landscape traveling in many directions. Views toward the transmission corridor from Boulder City are limited by the distance of the community from the Proposed Action alignment and the presence of other transmission line infrastructure.

The Proposed Action passes through the Sunrise Management Area and Rainbow Gardens geologic area, managed by the BLM. Scenic quality of the landscapes found along the proposed route in these areas is both Class A and C. Residual impacts to scenic quality would be minimal in these areas as existing lattice structure 500-kV transmission lines parallel the Proposed Action. Impacts to scenic quality generally are minimized if additional transmission lines are placed in the vicinity (corridor) of other lines. In this case, the attention of the casual viewer would not be drawn any more to a new line as it already is to existing lines within the corridor.

Implementation of the Proposed Action would result in adding long-term elements that would affect the existing landscape, including steel lattice and monopole structures, conductors, and access roads. These facilities are similar to the existing facilities that occur within the existing utility corridor along all but eight miles of the 48-mile route. In addition, management practices identified as part of the Proposed Action would minimize the visual effects from ground disturbances. Because the Proposed Action would be located mainly within a designated utility corridor adjacent to existing transmission lines, Western has concluded that the Proposed Action would not conflict with VRM objectives in the RMP and Nevada Power's management practices are sufficient to mitigate visual impacts. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to visual resources would occur from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Cultural Resources.

A significant impact to cultural resources could occur if there was a violation of state or Federal historic/archaeological/Native American preservation and protection regulations. The Proposed Action would impact 12 of 19 identified prehistoric sites and the five historic-period significant properties and will require some form of mitigation or treatment. Five of the sites are located on property managed by USBR (3 historic and 2 prehistoric). The remaining sites are located on BLM-managed lands. No sites are on Western-managed lands.

Affected prehistoric sites include four of the five Complex Features/Artifact Assemblage Sites identified in the study corridor and eight of the 10 Complex Feature/Artifact Assemblage Fragile Pattern sites. Affected historic-era properties include both of the Hoover Dam-related squatter campsites and segments of three separate railroads. A Historic Properties Treatment Plan or Data Recovery Plan will be developed as defined in the Programmatic Agreement (PA) between BLM, Western, USBR, Nevada Power and the Nevada State Historic Preservation Office. The Treatment Plan is subject to consultation by all signatories of the PA as well as identified interested persons and appropriate tribes. That plan will describe the specific impacts that each property would sustain and the mitigation measures appropriate for each affected property.

Gypsum Cave. Consultations with tribal representatives and tribal elders provided a range of possible mitigative alternatives for the preservation and long-term management of Gypsum Cave. Key aspects include: continued consultations with Tribes, nomination of Gypsum Cave to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP); a preservation plan under the BLM Las Vegas Field Office's Resource Management Plan that is informed by tribal perspectives regarding this property; limiting access to the site through road closures; installing a bat grate that both protects the bats that live in the recessed chambers of the cave and blocks human entrance into these chambers; and educating the public about this location's importance to Native American peoples and its value as an important archaeological and paleontological site. These alternatives would continue to receive consideration during on-going Native American consultations. Specific measures that would be implemented will be defined in the Historic Property Treatment Plan.

As a result, Western has concluded that although there would be impacts to cultural resources from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action, mitigation through enforcement of the PA, no violations of state or Federal historic/archaeological/Native American preservation and protection regulations would occur. Thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to land use would occur from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Land Use.

A significant impact could occur if there were any conflict(s) with Clark County land use and zoning that cannot be resolved. Impacts to existing or planned land uses would be minimal because construction would be mainly within a designated utility corridor. As described in the EA, Legislative action allows Nevada Power to cross the BLM Sunrise Mountain Instant Study Area within a defined corridor. Boundaries of this defined 500-foot corridor would be surveyed and/or verified to ensure proper placement of project facilities. Boundaries of the proposed construction activities would be clearly marked with flagging, signage or other distinctive markings to avoid construction crews straying onto adjacent areas during construction. Impacts to BLM-managed Special Recreation Management Areas and Extensive Recreation Management Areas are not anticipated. Although construction of the proposed 500-kV transmission line would require coordination with any scheduled activities, use of the area would not be curtailed.

Appropriate agreements or permits would be acquired for crossing of various roadways. Construction activities would utilize traffic and safety controls to minimize traffic delays and impacts to public safety. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) would be notified and a hazard determination would be obtained as a part of the Proposed Action. Nevada Power would install high-visibility devices if required by the FAA. Nevada Power would also contact the owner/operator of private airports and airstrips affected by the Proposed Action. The proposed route would cross several active mining claims. However, Gornowich Sand and Gravel Operation is the only developed mining facility that would be impacted by the Proposed Action. An easement would be obtained for this crossing; therefore, the Proposed Action would have minimal impact on active mining claims.

As a result, Western has concluded that there would be no conflicts with existing zoning or land use plans; thus, no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to land use would occur from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Socioeconomics.

A significant impact to socioeconomics could occur if:

- Induced population growth (beyond expected normal increases) that would result in a lack of public services within the community.
- Use of tax funds by the community that would not be compensated elsewhere.
- Permanent and irreversible loss of work for a major sector of the community.

Some beneficial socioeconomic impacts would result from construction spending, and to a lesser extent, maintenance worker spending. Most of the workforce would be temporarily housed in the adjacent communities and a portion of their income and

expenses would be spent locally, thus generating secondary income to the affected communities. Because the construction workforce would be small in comparison to the large construction-based economy of the Las Vegas area, negative effects are not expected for such public services as law enforcement or fire protection. Considering the short duration proposed for construction, construction of the Proposed Action would not induce substantial growth, displace any existing housing, disrupt or divide any communities, or decrease employment. As a result, no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant negative impacts to socioeconomics would be expected from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Environmental justice has been addressed in accordance with Executive Order 12898. Effects on minorities and Native Americans were considered. Disproportionate impacts on minorities and low-income populations are not expected as a result of the Proposed Action. Since minorities and Native Americans do not comprise a large proportion of the project area's total population, disproportionate cumulative impacts on these groups from the Proposed Action are unlikely.

Health and Safety.

A significant impact could occur if:

- Actions would result in health and safety impacts to area residents.
- A violation of Federal, state, or local regulations regarding handling, transport, or containment of hazardous materials.

The EA and EA errata include an analysis of the potential impacts of the proposed transmission line electric and magnetic fields (EMF). The long-term, magnetic exposure, which is the root of present health concerns, would be insignificant for the Proposed Action, given the general absence of residences and low frequency, low duration human exposure along the proposed transmission line. Based on the above, Western has concluded that the proposed transmission line would not cause significant adverse impacts related to electric and magnetic field exposure.

No hazardous material sites are recorded for the 500-kV study corridor site that would create a significant hazard to the public or the environment. The types of materials potentially present during construction would be vehicle fuels, lubricating oil, paints, adhesives, and sealants. Under ordinary use, none of these materials would result in the generation of hazardous waste. The contractor would be required to comply with the laws and ordinances pertaining to proper usage and, in the event of waste generation, disposal of such materials. Because the contractor is required to comply with Environmental Protection Agency, Occupation Safety and Health Administration, and other regulations, no significant impacts to public health and safety would be expected from the Proposed Action.

Water Resources.

A significant impact to water resource could occur if a:

- Degradation of water quality that would result in failure to meet drinking water standards.
- Susceptibility to on-site or off-site flooding due to altered surface hydrology.

The Proposed Action could degrade surface water resources due to stormwater discharges during construction, altering drainage patterns, and impacting area floodplains. However, any impacts from construction would be short term and would cease when construction activities are completed and the construction sites are stabilized. Long-term impacts to surface waters would persist due to use and maintenance of access roads. Considering the resource protection measures for the Proposed Action, including ensuring all construction activities minimize disturbance to vegetation and drainage channels, and implementing management practices to control erosion, Western has concluded that no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to surface water would occur.

Geology and Soils.

Significant impacts to geology and soils could occur if:

- Erosion or siltation would result in irreversible and unacceptable impacts to other resources.
- Loss of mineral resources that is not available elsewhere.
- Exposure of facilities or personnel to major geologic hazard (i.e., seismic).
- Conflicts with existing mining activities that cannot be resolved through negotiation with mine operators.

Impacts to geology and soils from the Proposed Action include short term impacts to a sand and gravel operation and increased erosion from runoff and wind due to compaction and loss of vegetation. Only one mine is located near the Proposed Action and no conflicts with mining activities are anticipated. With the implementation of the proposed resource protection measures, Western has concluded that the Proposed Action would not cause erosion that would result in impacts to other resources, result in the loss of mineral resources, or conflict with existing mining activities. Therefore, a direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impact to geology and soils is not expected.

Paleontological Resources.

Loss of scientific important paelontological resources would be a significant impact. A field reconnaissance resulted in the identification of 19 previously unrecorded paleontologic resource localities. All paleontologic localities are sited on lands administered by the BLM. Beyond these 19 previously undocumented localities, Gypsum Cave is located within the project study corridor with documented fossil

remains of extinct Pleistocene megafauna. Gypsum Cave is the first site in southern Nevada to yield fossils of extinct ground sloth.

Impacts to nonrenewable scientific important paleontological resources associated with construction activities could include crushing, destruction and removal, resulting in significant impacts. Paleontological resources within the project area were analyzed and ranked for sensitivity. Specific Paleontology Actions (PaleoAs) are specified in the EA under Appendix D and constitute the treatment plan for paleonotological resources. As a result, Western has concluded that with the implementation of the PaleoAs no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to paleontological resources would occur from the construction and operation of the Proposed Action.

Cumulative Effects. Cumulative effects on environmental resources in the Las Vegas valley have been examined. The addition of Harry Allen-Mead and future 500-kV transmission lines to the existing and planned additional array of lines increases the level of cumulative impact but not significantly, especially considering the placement of the project within a designated utility corridor. The Clark County Planning Department will work with Nevada Power, agencies and county and city departments to develop a planned approach to the future location of electrical transmission lines and generation sites by developing goals, policies, routing criteria, specific transmission line corridors and potential location for electrical generating facilities to avoid significant impacts from future utility projects. In addition, prior to beginning work, a plan of development (POD) that includes a BLM-approved restoration plan will be prepared and implemented. The POD would cover construction, operation, and maintenance of the Proposed Action and would be applicable to lands under Western's jurisdiction. With implementation of the POD, Nevada Power's management practices, and the mitigation measures defined to avoid significant impacts, the Proposed Action would not contribute to cumulative impacts.

Floodplain Statement of Findings. The Harry Allen-Mead Transmission Line would traverses 1.8 miles of FEMA-defined, 100-year floodplains at six separate locations. A Notice of Floodplain/Wetlands Involvement was issued locally in letters and public notices as indicated above.

One comment, from the Southern Nevada Water Authority, requested additional information on siting because of possible conflicts and because of a planned erosion control project in the Las Vegas Wash area. The Authority also requested ongoing coordination with activities in the Las Vegas Wash area. BLM's response provided a commitment to have Nevada Power continue to coordinate and provide requested information.

The EA includes a floodplain assessment as required by DOE's Floodplain/Wetlands Environmental Review Requirements (10 CFR part 1022). Work within the boundaries of the floodplains would be required as the proposed transmission line route would cross floodplains. An effort would be made to avoid

placing any structures within the 100-year floodplains. Only one floodplain location is wide enough to pose a problem for spanning. If placement of structures within the floodplain cannot be avoided, structures would be reinforced and engineered to withstand flood events. The new structures would withstand flood occurrences. No changes would occur to the drainage patterns of the floodplains crossed. While the no action alternative would not require action within floodplains, it would not meet the purpose and need of the project.

All activity proposed within the floodplains would be conducted in accordance with local floodplain protection requirements. The activities would be coordinated and permitted with the county, municipal, and local floodplain administrators. Significant impacts to one of these floodplains could occur if water flow characteristics were altered such that property downstream was damaged by the altered flow. Based on the measures proposed for the transmission line no direct, indirect or cumulative floodplain impacts are expected from the proposed project.

Tribal Consultations -- Western initiated consultations with 16 tribes through a letter date August 21, 2003, and offer for site visits and meeting. As a result, Western and BLM's representative met with the Hopi tribe on September 24, 2003. Western received no other requests from tribes for meetings or site visits.

Determination -- Based on the analysis in the EA, Western has determined that mitigation measures are needed to reduce the potential for significant environmental impacts. The implementation of these measures under Western's jurisdiction is addressed in a MAP issued concurrently with the EA. The analyses contained in the EA, along with the mitigation commitments in the MAP, indicate that the proposed action is not a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Western has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

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