

Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Ojo Caliente Proposed Transmission Line

Carson National Forest and BLM Taos Field Office Taos and Rio Arriba Counties, New Mexico

Lead Agency: USDA Forest Service

Cooperating Agency: USDI Bureau of Land Management

Responsible Agency: Martin D. Chavez, Jr., Forest Supervisor
Carson National Forest
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571

Ron Hunsinger, Field Office Manager
BLM Taos Field Office
226 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571

For Information Contact: Ben Kuykendall, Project Leader
Carson National Forest
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571
(505) 758-6311

Abstract: In order to provide adequate power for current and future needs, prevent power outages and fluctuations, improve reliability and reduce line loss costs to all Kit Carson Electric Cooperative (KCEC) users, the Carson National Forest and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Taos Field Office propose to authorize KCEC to construct, operate and maintain a new 115 kV transmission line across National Forest System and BLM lands. It would run from the existing 115 kV transmission line in the 115/345 kV corridor just north of Black Mesa to a proposed substation location on BLM lands north of the Ojo Caliente community. The transmission line proposal should sufficiently serve the power needs of the area.

Besides serving the Ojo Caliente area, KCEC is responsible for serving other areas in Taos County. Electrical service has never been available to residents along a portion of U.S. 285 between the existing 25 kV corridor and Tres Piedras. There is also a need for providing service to these residents along U.S. 285.

In addition to the No Action (Alternative A) and Proposed Action (Alternative B) alternatives, two other alternatives and an Option for a Tres Piedras Connection were developed and analyzed in detail. Alternative C would tap into the existing 115 kV line in the 115/345 kV corridor near Carson and run within the existing 25 kV corridor to the proposed substation on BLM lands near Ojo Caliente. Alternative D would tap into the existing 115 kV line, adjacent to Forest Road 285P. It would cross U.S. 285 close to where the highway makes a 90-degree turn, and then run parallel to U.S. 285, at a distance of up to one-half mile north from the highway, to the proposed substation on BLM lands near Ojo Caliente. The Tres Piedras Connection Option is not a stand-alone alternative. It would allow for the construction of a 25 kV distribution line from the existing 25 kV distribution line in the vicinity of the microwave station just north of the intersection of NM 567 and U.S. 285, and connect into the existing line that comes south from Tres Piedras

along U.S. 285. The Option would be entirely on National Forest System lands. The Preferred Alternative is to select Alternative D with the Option.

Review of Comments: Comments shall be accepted for 45 days following the date of publication in the “Federal Register” pursuant to 40 CFR parts 1500-1508. The decision for this analysis will come under the 36 CFR 215 administrative appeal regulations. It is the responsibility of all individuals and organizations to ensure that their comments are received in a timely manner. Public comments on the proposed action will be accepted for 45 days following the date of publication of the notice of availability in the “Federal Register.” See cover letter for more details on commenting.

Reviewers have an obligation to structure their participation in the National Environmental Policy Act process so that it is meaningful and alerts the Agency to the reviewers’ position and contentions. Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power Corp. v. NRDC, 435 U.S. 519, 553 (1978). Environmental objections that could have been raised at the draft stage may be waived if not raised until after completion of the final environmental impact statement. City of Angoon v. Hodel (9th Circuit, 1986) and Wisconsin Heritages, Inc. v. Harris, 490 F. Supp. 1334, 1338 (E.D. Wis. 1980). Comments on the draft environmental impact statement should be specific and should address the adequacy of the statement and the merits of the alternatives discussed (40 CFR 1503.3).

Send Comments to: Martin D. Chavez, Jr., Forest Supervisor
Carson National Forest
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, New Mexico 87571

Comments must be received no later than 45 days from publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) for this DEIS in the “Federal Register.” The NOA is expected to be published on:

When the “Federal Register” date is known, it will be provided on the forest’s Web site (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/carson>) and in “The Taos News” *Classified* section under legal notices.

