



**File Code:** 2720  
**Date:** March 2, 2020

Dear Interested Party,

The White River National Forest (WRNF) is inviting public comment on a proposal to consider issuing a special use authorization (SUA) for a proposed transmission line on portions of the WRNF, and if so, under what terms and conditions. An Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to disclose the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the Proposed Action on the human and biological environment. The Forest Service would appreciate your input in helping to identify issues that will be addressed in the forthcoming environmental analysis. The formal Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA), map, and additional project information can be found on the project web page: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=57224>

Holy Cross Energy (HCE) hosted a public open house on Wednesday, January 30, 2019 in Minturn, Colorado to inform the public and help shape this proposal. WRNF is hosting a public open house, scheduled at the USFS Holy Cross Ranger Station at 24747 U.S. Hwy 24, Minturn CO, on Thursday March 12, 2020 from 4:30 to 7pm.

#### **BACKGROUND**

Holy Cross Energy (HCE) proposes to construct a new 115-kV electric transmission line between the existing Gilman and Avon substations in Eagle County, Colorado. HCE, in coordination with Xcel Energy, performs periodic reviews of the regional electric system to evaluate known weaknesses or problem areas. Because the existing electrical system in the Avon-Minturn-Vail area is a “radial” rather than “loop” system, there is no backup for some portions of the electrical grid. A radial system is essentially a dead-end, with a single supply for a group of customers. A loop system provides alternative energy sources that can be switched to feed energy, avoiding outages if part of the system fails. For the Minturn and Red Cliff communities, engaging backup energy supplies relies on hand-switching power supplies on the ground, which can be problematic in inclement weather. Over the last three years, HCE has coordinated with affected communities and has held public outreach meetings. The proposed transmission line is 8.9 miles in length and crosses approximately three miles of National Forest System (NFS) land. Based on preliminary internal scoping, the WRNF has determined that an EA is appropriate to document the anticipated effects of the Proposed Action on the human and biological environment. The results of the EA will be used to determine whether to issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) or proceed to further analysis by preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

#### **PURPOSE AND NEED**

The purpose of the project is to provide increased service reliability to HCE customers located in the communities of Vail, EagleVail, Avon, Edwards, and parts of Eagle and to serve as a backup transmission circuit for the communities of Minturn, Red Cliff, and surrounding areas. The need for the proposed project is driven by current risks of electrical outages and service interruptions due to a lack of redundancy in the current local transmission circuit. Enhanced reliability would benefit public safety, local and regional economies, and national security.



## **PROPOSED ACTION**

To address the purpose and need, the Forest Service proposes to issue a Special Use Authorization (SUA) to HCE, allowing them to construct, operate and maintain a transmission line between the substation at Avon and the substation at Gilman. The proposed action includes construction of new power structures along 8.9 miles of new transmission line; right-of-way clearing and removal of hazard trees; conductor stringing and splicing work; staging and access via vehicle, ATV, and helicopter; and minor maintenance and patrolling. Approximately three miles of the total transmission line alignment (8.9 miles) occurs on National Forest System (NFS) land, and about three miles of the total is anticipated to be placed underground. Specific sections to be buried on NFS land will be determined as part of the final alternative development (note that the Forest Service cannot dictate where the line is buried for the segments of the project that are not on NFS land). The remainder of the transmission line would be on overhead transmission structures. Supporting structures for the overhead portion of the line would be primarily single-pole wood or steel, ranging from 50 to 75 feet in height. The WRNF SUA also would authorize the use of existing and new access roads for the associated construction and maintenance activities. Some existing access roads would require improvement for use by the project, and short "spur" roads to structures may be needed. There are two main areas of limited ground (road) access that are anticipated to require helicopter-only construction (see map).

The attached map shows the proposed 8.9-mile alignment and in relation to the local communities and surrounding NFS lands. This proposed route is located in the Eagle River Valley in Eagle County. The right-of-way would run southeast from the Avon substation, transition to underground just north of the Game Creek area, pass through the east side of Minturn before transitioning back to overhead construction, and terminate at the Gilman substation. The project is within Townships 5 and 6 South, Range 81 West, 6th Principal Meridian, Eagle County, Colorado. Much of the proposed route is within existing utility rights-of-way already occupied by other existing linear utility facilities/infrastructure, including an HCE distribution line, as well as a gas pipeline and distribution line operated by Xcel Energy. Construction would take about eight months and would occur when conditions are favorable (late spring through fall timeframe).

## **REQUEST FOR COMMENTS**

Please note that this 30-day period is serving as both scoping and the sole comment period for the Proposed Action. There will not be another opportunity to comment.

Specific written comments on the proposed project will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of a legal notice in the Glenwood Post Independent, on March 2, 2020. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period, which will end April 1, 2020.

An open house to inform the public on the project and to answer questions will be held on March 12, 2020 at the Minturn Ranger Station, 24747 Highway 24, Minturn, CO 81645 from 4:30 to 7:00pm.

Written comments must be submitted via mail, fax, electronically, or in person (Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., excluding holidays) to: Mr. Scott Fitzwilliams, Forest Supervisor,

c/o Matt Klein, Realty Specialist, White River National Forest, PO Box 190, Minturn, CO 81645; FAX (970) 827-9343. Comments may also be submitted online at: <https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?Project=57224>.

Persons commenting should include: 1) name, address, telephone number, organization represented, if any; 2) title of project for which the comment is being submitted (Holy Cross energy Avon-to-Gilman Electric Transmission Line); and 3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who submit timely and specific written comments will have eligibility to file an objection to the project under 36 CFR §218.8. Names and contact information submitted with comments will become part of the public record and may be released under the Freedom of Information Act. Additional information regarding this action and the comment process can be obtained from: Matt Klein, Realty Specialist for the Eagle-/Holy Cross Ranger District, White River National Forest, 970-827-5182, [matthew.klein@usda.gov](mailto:matthew.klein@usda.gov). This legal notice also serves to notify and invite public comment on the proposal as stipulated in 36 CFR 800.3 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

Thank you for your participation. I look forward to your comments.

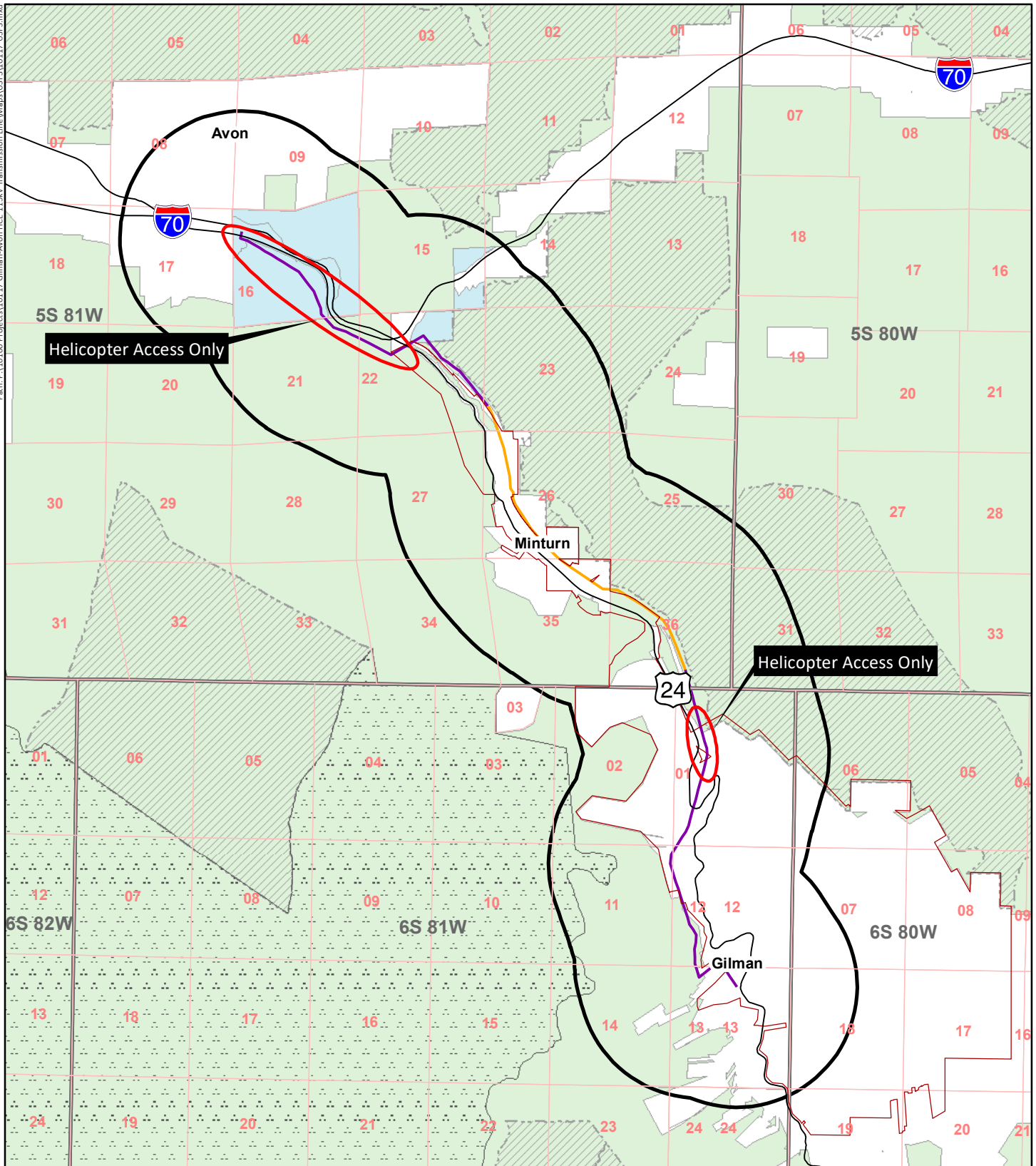
Sincerely,



SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS  
Forest Supervisor

cc: Adam Bianchi, Marcia Gilles, Rich Doak, Carole Huey, Matt Klein

Path: P:\101000 Project\10117 Gilman-Avon HCE 115kV Transmission Line\Map\USFS\10117 USFS.mxd



- Overhead Transmission Line
- Underground Transmission Line
- Transmission Line 1-Mile Buffer
- Town of Minturn
- Roadless Area
- Holy Cross Wilderness
- Private
- State Land
- US Forest Service

UTM NAD 83: Zone 13N; 377864.75mE, 4382345.96mN



**Avon to Gilman 115-kV  
Transmission Line Project  
Proposed Action  
Eagle County, CO**

File: 10117 USFS.mxd (WH)  
February 27, 2020

