

3.15 OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following discussion is divided into 11 sections that address the items identified in 40 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1502.16 and the executive orders that address wetlands and floodplains and environmental justice, as well as effects on civil rights. In many cases, as noted below, these items are addressed in the preceding sections.

3.15.1 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

Irreversible commitments of resources result from management decisions that affect nonrenewable resources such as soils, wetlands, and heritage sites. Such commitments are considered irreversible when the affected resource deteriorates to the point that renewal can only occur over a long period of time or at great expense, or because the resource has been destroyed or removed.

An irretrievable commitment of results is when a loss of production or use of resources occurs as a result of management decisions. Opportunities are foregone for the period of time that the resource cannot be used.

The effects of the proposed alternatives on natural resources are discussed in detail in the preceding sections of this chapter. These analyses did not identify any irreversible commitments of resources. The action alternatives would all involve ground disturbance associated with transmission and distribution structure installation, removal, or replacement, road improvements, construction laydown, and, in the case of Alternatives 2, 3, and 5, a new substation site. This disturbance would affect nonrenewable resources to varying degrees depending on the alternative and the resource, but the effects are not expected to be irreversible. While there would be localized disturbance in a number of areas, this is not expected to result in the overall deterioration, destruction, or removal of any nonrenewable resource in the project area.

All of the action alternatives would involve the use of land for construction and operation of the proposed facilities. This use would represent an irretrievable commitment in that the areas where the structures are placed, the cleared right-of-way, and the new substation, included under Alternatives 2, 3, and 5, would not be available for some other use. This is not expected to be a substantial loss under any of the alternatives. This is especially the case with Alternatives 4, 6, and 7, which mainly involve rebuilding existing utility lines. There would also be an irreversible commitment of diesel associated with the temporary generation facility that is included as part of Alternative 6.

3.15.1.1 Unavoidable Adverse Environmental Effects

All probable adverse environmental effects are described earlier in this chapter.

3.15.1.2 Short-Term Use Versus Long-Term Productivity

The action alternatives involve improvements to the existing electrical system in the Methow Valley. These improvements are expected to serve the valley for the foreseeable future and may be considered a long-term use of the land. There would be no tradeoff of long-term productivity at the expense of short-term use.

3.15.1.3 Effects on Prime Farmland, Rangeland, and Forest Land

All alternatives are in keeping with the intent of the Secretary of Agriculture Memorandum 1827 for prime land. Prime farmlands are defined as those lands that have the best physical and chemical characteristics for producing items such as food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops, which have not already been targeted for urban development or water storage [CFR 730-733 section 657.5]. The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) identifies soil mapping units within the state of Washington that qualify as prime based on specific soil criteria. Soil mapping units may be classified as prime farmland under current conditions, or as prime farmland given that certain qualifying conditions exist on the site (e.g., “prime farmland when irrigated,” “prime farmland when protected from flooding,” etc.). In such cases, if the qualifying conditions do not exist, the unit is considered

“not prime.” There is no prime farmland within the portion of the project area that has been surveyed by the NRCS; however, there are approximately 8,631 acres of “prime farmland when irrigated.”

NRCS does not assign a specific prime forestland status to soil types but defines prime forestland as land capable of growing wood at the rate of 85 cubic feet per acre per year at culmination of mean annual increment (CMAI). There are two parcels of prime forestland overlapping the project area boundary, one north (196 acres) and one south (49 acres) of the Loup Loup line just west of the intersection of State Highway 20 and U.S. Highway 97.

Prime rangeland is rangeland that, because of its soil, climate, topography, vegetation, and location, has the highest quality or value for grazing animals. The potential natural vegetation is palatable, nutritious, and available to the kinds of herbivores common to the area. The prime rangeland designation is based on criteria outlined in the USDA Statement of Land Use Policy (DR 9500-3, March 22, 1983.). There is no prime rangeland within the project area.

3.15.1.4 Urban Quality and Historic and Heritage Resources

The direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the alternatives on historic and heritage resources are discussed in Section 3.12, Cultural Resources. Effects on land use are discussed in Section 3.9, Land Use. None of the communities in the project area met the Census Bureau’s definition of urban in 2000. The census defines an urban area as a village, town, city, or census-designated place with population greater of 2,500 or more persons. Issues surrounding quality of life are discussed in Section 3.13, Social and Economic Environment, and Section 3.11, Visual Resources.

3.15.1.5 Energy Requirements and Conservation Potential of Alternatives

The overall purpose of the Methow Transmission Project is to provide reliable electric power to the Methow Valley and improve electric distribution to customers in the lower Methow Valley. The action alternatives all have the potential to improve energy conservation by reducing existing line losses. “Line loss” refers to energy that is consumed by the conductor (wire) generating heat during the transport of power through each line. The high winter peak power loads currently experienced by the existing Loup Loup transmission line contribute significantly to system losses.

All of the proposed Methow Valley transmission improvements have the capability to reduce overall system power losses over the “No Action” alternative, in some cases by up to 1,000 average kW, which is equivalent to the amount of power required to serve about 450 homes in Okanogan County. The greatest potential for conservation would occur under Alternatives 2 and 3, where line losses would be reduced by \$351,500 and \$53,000 annually for the transmission and distribution systems, respectively. Alternative 5 follows with estimated annual transmission and distribution line loss reductions of \$256,300 and \$53,000, respectively. Alternatives 4, 6, and 7 would have annual line loss reductions of \$256,300 and \$50,000 for these systems. Power system improvements are considered conservation actions and can provide good returns on investment when compared to many more conventional conservation programs.

3.15.1.6 Potential Conflicts with Plans and Policies of Other Jurisdictions

Existing land use plans and policies are discussed in Section 3.9, Land Use. Utility facilities are conditional uses in all land use zones crossed by the proposed alternatives. Utility facilities are also conditional uses at the proposed substation and temporary generation sites required under Alternatives 2, 3, and 5 and Alternative 6, respectively. Easements and permits required from Federal and state agencies are identified in Table 3.9-7. All alternatives are consistent with the Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, BLM Spokane Resource Management Plan and Amendments (BLM, 1985), Okanogan County Comprehensive Plan and Amendments, and Colville Confederated Tribes Agreement.

3.15.1.7 Wetlands and Floodplains

Activities on Federally owned land follow Executive Order 11990 that requires Federal agencies “to avoid ... adverse impacts associated with the destruction or modification of wetlands ... wherever there is a practicable alternative.” This order establishes a sequencing policy of avoidance, minimization, and possible mitigation. Federally owned lands also fall under the jurisdiction of the policies of the Federal agency that manages the land. Actions on National Forest System lands are currently governed by the 1989 Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan as amended by PACFISH 1995 (see Section 3.7, Fisheries). The potential effects of the alternatives on wetlands and riparian vegetation are discussed in Section 3.6, Wetlands. None of the alternatives are expected to have significant floodplain impacts (see Section 3.7, Fisheries).

3.15.1.8 Consumers, Civil Rights, Minority Groups, Low-Income Populations, and Women

Civil Rights would not be affected by any of the alternatives. The project includes work accomplished by the PUD and the USDA Forest Service, as well as contracted work. Under Executive Order 11246, companies with Federal contracts or subcontracts are prohibited from job discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The U. S. Department of Agriculture prohibits discrimination in its employment practices based on race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital and family status.

Executive Order 12898 (59 FR 7629, 1994), Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, directs Federal agencies to identify and address, as appropriate, any disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations. Environmental justice is discussed in Section 3.13.2.6.

3.15.2 Federal, State, and Local Laws

All of the alternatives are consistent with Federal, state, and local laws. Disclosure information is contained in the following sections:

- 3.2 Air Quality (Clean Air Act)
- 3.4 Hydrology and Water Quality (Clean Water Act)
- 3.5 Rare Plants (Endangered Species Act [ESA])
- 3.6 Wetlands and Riparian (Executive Order and Management Plans)
- 3.7 Fish (ESA, Magnuson Stevens Act, and Management Plans)
- 3.8 Wildlife (ESA and Management Plans)
- 3.9 Land Use (Management Plans)
- 3.11 Visuals (Management Plans)
- 3.12 Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act)
- 3.14 Noise, Public Health, Safety (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Revised Code of Washington)
- 3.15 Other

3.15.3 Public Health and Safety

No public health or safety problems are anticipated under any of the proposed alternatives. Public health and safety is discussed in Section 3.14.