



METHOW TRANSMISSION PROJECT

Public SCOPING Notice



Public Utility District No. 1
of Okanogan County



USDA Forest Service, Okanogan and
Wenatchee National Forests, Okanogan
Valley Office

November 2003

The Public Utility District No. 1 of Okanogan County (PUD) and the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) will jointly prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will evaluate alternatives to provide reliable electric power to the Methow Valley and improve electric distribution to customers in the lower Methow Valley. This will be a joint Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) EIS. The PUD will be the Lead SEPA agency and the Forest Service will be the lead NEPA agency.

Project Purpose and Need

The PUD is a non-profit local government entity whose mission is to provide reliable electrical service to those within its defined boundaries, and to plan for the future electrical service needs of its constituency (Title 54 RCW). The PUD is responsible for providing electrical service to the communities of Pateros, Twisp, and the unincorporated area of the lower Methow Valley in Okanogan County, among other communities in its service area. The Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan permits and gives priority to special uses that provide public service. Pateros, Twisp, and the unincorporated lower Methow Valley area are currently served by a single transmission route constructed in 1948 that crosses Loup Loup Pass from Okanogan to Twisp. Distribution of that electrical service throughout the lower Methow Valley depends on a system that is approaching capacity now under average winter conditions and will not meet severe winter demand. The PUD has proposed the construction of a new transmission line, a new substation, and improvements to the distribution system in order to meet its obligations under the law to provide reliable electricity at reasonable rates to its ratepayers.

The PUD is also a party to a general transfer agreement (GTA) with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) for providing transmission service to the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (Co-op). The Co-op provides service to the upper Methow Valley, including the towns of Winthrop and Mazama. BPA has notified the PUD that the reliability of the existing transmission system is below standard.

Project Background

In 1998, the PUD proposed to construct a new 115 kilovolt (KV) transmission line with associated access roads and a substation between Twisp and Pateros in Okanogan County, Washington (the Twisp-Pateros transmission line and substation project). The PUD prepared an expanded SEPA Checklist for the project. The Checklist and a Determination of Non-Significance (DNS) were issued on August 24, 1998, with a second volume that responded to public comment and provided additional information issued in February 1999. The DNS was appealed to the Superior Court of Washington for Okanogan County and the court remanded the PUD's decision, in part because of suggestions that other alternatives be considered that might eliminate the need for the proposed transmission line. In a Memorandum Opinion issued March 6, 2000, Judge Jack Burchard ordered that an EIS be prepared. This EIS is being prepared in response to that Opinion.

The Forest Service is a joint lead agency for the project because one alternative solution identified by the appellants, and two preliminary alternatives identified for this project, involve a "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup Loup transmission line, part of which crosses the Okanogan National Forest. A "hot" rebuild would involve replacing the existing high-voltage transmission line and its poles while maintaining power in the existing lines.

Proposed Action

The proposed action (the project proposed by the PUD) involves construction of approximately 26.5 miles of 115 KV electric transmission line and associated access roads between Twisp and Pateros in Okanogan County, Washington. The first 5.5 miles of transmission line (from the existing Twisp substation) would overbuild existing distribution along Highways 20 and 153. Existing poles would be replaced as part of this overbuild. The remainder of the proposed transmission line would be constructed along the benches and foothills to the east of Highway 153. The final 1.7 miles of the proposed transmission line (south to the existing Pateros substation) would parallel Watson Draw Road. The location of the proposed line is shown on the enclosed map. The proposed project would also include construction of a new substation located along Highway 153 between Carlton and Methow in the Gold Creek area (see enclosed map), as well as improvements to the existing distribution system. Construction of the proposed project would take place in 2006.

Under NEPA, the “proposed action” may be, but is not necessarily, the agency’s “preferred alternative.” The proposed action identified above represents the PUD’s initial proposal that has not yet undergone analysis in the EIS process. The EIS process will involve evaluation of the proposed action described above, as well as other reasonable alternatives to the proposed action that meet the project’s Purpose and Need.

Preliminary Issues

A number of issues were identified in the comments received on the *SEPA Checklist and Determination of Nonsignificance* issued for the Twisp-Pateros transmission line and substation project by the PUD in August 1998. Major issues identified included potential effects to eagles and sharp-tailed grouse, critical deer habitat, noxious weeds, aesthetic concerns, road issues, erosion, and cumulative effects. The Forest Service has identified the following preliminary issues should a “hot” rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line be identified by the agencies as their preferred alternative: impacts on visual quality, potential for spread of noxious weeds, potential for sedimentation, and safety during construction activities.

Preliminary Alternatives

The preliminary alternatives identified at this scoping stage include the No Action Alternative (required for comparison purposes under NEPA/SEPA), the Proposed Action, and four other preliminary action alternatives representing two potential routes other than the one included in the Proposed Action. Each of these preliminary alternatives is described below. The three potential routes are shown on the enclosed project map.

The No Action Alternative

Under this alternative, there would be no new powerline built and no upgrade or rebuild of the existing Loup Loup line would occur.

The Proposed Action

Under this alternative, approximately 26.5 miles of 115 KV electric transmission line would be constructed between Twisp and Pateros, along with associated access roads and a new substation located along Highway 153 between Carlton and Methow in the Gold Creek Area. Improvements to the existing distribution system would also be made.

Other Preliminary Action Alternatives

- Undertake a “hot” rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line. This alternative would include approximately 15 miles of new transmission line from Pateros to Gold Creek, as well as a new substation in the Gold Creek area. The 15 miles of new transmission line would follow the same alignment as that portion of the proposed Twisp-Pateros transmission line. Improvements to the existing distribution system would also be made.
- Undertake a “hot” rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line that would include an upgrade of distribution between Twisp and Pateros, but not a new substation or the 15 miles of new line to Gold Creek identified in the above alternative. Improvements to the existing distribution system would also be made.

Preliminary Alternatives. . . continued

- Construct a new transmission line that would overbuild or follow the existing distribution line near the Methow River along the valley floor. This alternative would also include a new substation located in the Gold Creek area. Improvements to the existing distribution system would also be made.
- Construct a new transmission line along the valley floor that would be aligned to reduce the number of Methow River crossings that would be involved in overbuilding or following the existing distribution line. This alternative would also include construction of a new substation in the Gold Creek area. Improvements to the existing distribution system would also be made.

Scoping

Public participation will be especially important at several points during this project, including this initial public scoping period. The participating agencies are currently seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies; Native American Tribes; and other individuals and organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed project. This input will be used in preparation of the Draft EIS.

The public is specifically requested to provide input that will assist with the following tasks:

- **Identify major issues to be analyzed in depth.**
- **Identify issues that have already been adequately addressed by a relevant previous environmental analysis**, including the *SEPA Checklist and Determination of Nonsignificance (DNS)* and *Response to Comments and Additional Information on the SEPA Checklist and DNS* documents prepared by the PUD.
- **Identify potential environmental effects of the alternatives identified to date (as described in this scoping notice).**
- **Identify potential alternatives that meet the Purpose and Need of the project.**

Opportunities to Participate During Scoping

The public scoping period for this project extends from **November 12, 2003 to December 15, 2003**. Interested parties are encouraged to provide written input on the proposed project by submitting comments in one of the ways listed under Contact Information on the back page. Comments should be postmarked, e-mailed, or faxed no later than **December 15, 2003**.

To better assist us in the scoping process, please make your comments as specific as possible. For example, if you are concerned about right-of-way clearing along the proposed Twisp-Pateros route, your comment might read: "I am concerned about the potential harvest of trees in the vicinity of Texas Creek."

A public scoping meeting will be held at Liberty Bell High School, 18 Twin Lakes Road in Winthrop on November 24, 2003 from 5 to 7 p.m. The meeting will follow an open house format. Interested parties may drop in until 7 p.m. to obtain information about the project, speak with project team members, and provide scoping comments to the team.

Contact Information

Comments should be postmarked or e-mailed to us no later than **December 15, 2003**. **If you do not respond, we will assume that you are not interested in this project and your name will be removed from the project mailing list.** If you e-mail your comments and wish to remain a part of the project mailing list, please be sure to include your name and mailing address in the e-mail so we do not inadvertently remove you from the mailing list. All responses received (including names and addresses) will become part of the public file. This information will be made available to the public, if requested.

Comments may be submitted via mail to either of the following addresses:

**Public Utility District No. 1
of Okanogan County
P.O. Box 912
Okanogan, WA 98840**

**USDA, Forest Service
Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests
Okanogan Valley Office
1240 Second Avenue South
Okanogan, WA 98840**

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Comments may be submitted via e-mail to either of the following addresses:

(derek@okpud.org)

or

scoping_comments_okanogan_wenatchee@fs.fed.us

Comments may be submitted via fax to either of the following numbers:

Fax: (509) 422-4020 (PUD)

or

Fax: (509) 826-3789 (Forest Service)

Questions about the proposed project, the EIS, or the scoping process may be addressed to:

**Derek Miller at the PUD at (509) 422-8422
(derek@okpud.org)**

or

**Keith Rowland at the Forest Service
at (509) 826-3067 (krowland@fs.fed.us)**



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INSIDE: *Information on the Methow Transmission Project, the public comment period, and the upcoming public open house*

