

Short-term Uses and Long-term Productivity

NEPA requires consideration of “the relationship between short-term uses of man’s environment and the maintenance and enhancement of long-term productivity” (40 CFR 1502.16). As declared by Congress, this includes using all practicable means and measures, including financial and technical assistance, in a manner calculated to foster and promote the general welfare, to create and maintain conditions under which man and nature can exist in productive harmony, and fulfill the social, economic, and other requirements of present and future generations of Americans (NEPA Section 101).

Soils and Water Quality

The soil resource is a key ingredient for maintaining the long-term productive potential for an area. Erosion and effects that may be detrimental to the soil resource would be insignificant even in the short term. Soil protection measures in the Southwestern Region Soil and Water Conservation Practices Handbook [9] and forest plan standards and guidelines [5] would maintain critical soil parameters and nutrients, ensuring long-term productivity if any of the action alternatives were implemented.

Short-term effects of the proposed activities could include a small change in sediment delivery to the Rio Ojo Caliente. However relative to current or background conditions, any increase in sediment delivery would be insignificant. These effects are negligible and would not affect long-term productivity. Beneficial uses, including the Rio Ojo Caliente, would not be adversely affected to any measurable degree.

Vegetation

Although the effects to vegetation from any of the alternatives pales in comparison to the natural events of piñon pine die off, any changes from cutting trees to construct a new power line should not be considered short term. The nature of the project should be considered permanent. For all other plant species, long-term productivity would not be significantly altered.

Wildlife

Short-term uses of the area would consist of the construction phase of the project. Habitat disturbance would occur during this period. Existing suitable habitats for special status species would not decline from the implementation of any action alternative. In spite of this, juniper titmouse populations, a management indicator species, is likely to decline with the loss of habitat based on the natural mortality of piñon. This proposal would have an insignificant contribution to the situation and is largely unrelated. Based on the large amount of remaining habitats, it is unlikely that viability of the species is in jeopardy from piñon mortality in the area. There would be no potential impacts to the long-term productivity for other wildlife resources.

Visual Resources

The nature of the project should be considered a permanent visual fixture on the landscape. Any of the action alternatives for both the short and long term are expected to diminish visual and sce-

nic quality. The greatest visual impacts to both the traveling visitor and local residents would be Alternative C. Other than the No Action Alternative, the least visual intrusion would be Alternative D, which would actually improve visual resources for approximately 6 miles along U.S. 285. The only short-term visual intrusion would be the removal of that portion of the existing 25 kV. This improvement would be offset if the Tres Piedras Connection were to be constructed further north on U.S. 285.

Recreation

Recreation within the analysis area is limited to mostly hunting, firewood gathering, piñon nut collecting and all-terrain-vehicle (ATV) use. These and other recreational activities are mostly related to vehicle access. The average user in the Semiprimitive Motorized setting would experience little change. A transmission line in combination with the road system would not significantly change the experience for most of the recreationists who currently use the study area. The only setting indicator that would change if a transmission line were to be constructed is Naturalness, which is directly related to the visual quality portion of the recreation experience. Again, the nature of the project should be considered a permanent alteration and not short term. Alternatives B and C would have a more far reaching effect on naturalness of the area because they could be seen from much further distances than Alternative D.

Heritage Resources

Through proper mitigation and site avoidance there should be no short- or long-term gains or losses in heritage resources.

Social and Economic Environment

In the short term, the average user should notice an immediate increase in reliability of electrical power. Damage to sensitive equipment should no longer be a worry. Since the proposal should provide adequate power indefinitely, the long-term economic benefits to the service areas should be positive.

Public Health and Safety

Alternative C is the only alternative that could generate any EMF concerns. Other safety concerns—such as fire—would not increase as a result of the proposal.

Roads

In the short term there would be some additional access ways created for construction. It is anticipated that a couple of miles of two-track may result over the long term from continued use by motorized recreationists. No additional improved roads would result from the project. Any post construction access on BLM lands would remain limited to existing roads and trails.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

Irreversible commitments of resources are those that cannot be regained, such as the extinction of a species or the removal of mined ore. Irretrievable commitments are those that are lost for a pe-

riod of time such as the temporary loss of timber productivity in forested areas that are kept clear for use as a power line right-of-way or road.

Soils and Water

Any soil lost from construction of a new transmission line within the project area would be considered an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of the soil resource. Best management practices would be used to minimize soil productivity losses from construction activities. None of the proposed activities would result in irretrievable effects to water.

Vegetation

For any of the action alternatives, and to some degree Alternative A, any site-specific location required for long-term maintenance access would be considered an irretrievable commitment of vegetation resources. Actual pole placement sites would also be considered as such. There would not be any irreversible commitment of resources.

Wildlife

None of alternatives are likely to involve or invoke the irreversible commitment of wildlife resources. As stated in “vegetation” above, some of the removal of vegetation would be irretrievable with regard to habitat alterations.

Visual Resources

Although not irreversible, any of the action alternatives would, for all practical purposes, involve the irretrievable commitment of visual resources. Any of the action alternatives would change the character of the scenery over at least the next 50 years. The removal of the line would instantaneously change visual quality.

Recreation

Although no irreversible and irretrievable commitments of recreational opportunities would be made, the “naturalness” in the vicinity of any of the action alternatives would be diminished and would be considered irretrievable.

Heritage Resources

Through proper mitigation and site avoidance there should be no irreversible and irretrievable commitment of heritage resources.

Social and Economic Environment

With the exception of the No Action Alternative, any of the alternatives should provide adequate power indefinitely. The long-term economic benefits to the service area should be positive. None of the alternatives are expected to have any irreversible or irretrievable commitments to the social or economic environments.

Public Health and Safety

None of the alternatives are expected to have any irreversible or irretrievable commitments to the public health and safety aspects of the communities.

Roads

As stated earlier, there would be some additional access ways created for construction. It is anticipated that a couple of miles of two-track may result over the long term from continued use by motorized recreationists. No additional improved roads would result from the project. Any post construction access on BLM land would remain limited to existing roads and trails. There would be no irreversible commitment of resources, but based on the intent and nature of the project, new access ways (two-track) should be considered irretrievable commitments of resources.

Unavoidable Adverse Effects

Soils and Water

Long-term soil productivity would not be significantly affected. However, soil erosion may contribute to a slight decrease in soil productivity at pole locations and would be unavoidable adverse effects to soils.

None of the proposed activities would result in an unavoidable adverse environmental effect on water.

Wildlife

None of the alternatives would cause unavoidable adverse effects related to wildlife resources.

Visual Resources

Under any of the action alternatives, unavoidable effects to scenic resources would occur. Based on the alternative selected, the intensity of effects and the amount of area where the project could be visible and the type of user affected varies considerably.

Recreation

The unavoidable adverse effects to recreational users are almost entirely based on visual intrusion of the naturalness of the area.

Heritage Resources

Based on a complete inventory of the area prior to any decision and implementation of proper mitigation such as avoidance, there would be no unavoidable adverse effects to heritage resources associated with the alternatives or the option.

Social and Economic Environment

None of the proposed activities would result in an adverse impact on the social and economic environment.

Public Health and Safety

Alternative C is the only alternative that could generate any electric and magnetic field (EMF) concerns. Other safety concerns, such as fire, would not increase as a result of the proposal. It is unlikely that the proposal would result in any unavoidable adverse impact on public health and safety.

Roads

None of the proposed activities would result in any unavoidable adverse impact on roads.

Other Required Disclosures

NEPA at 40 CFR 1502.25(a) directs “to the fullest extent possible, agencies shall prepare draft environmental impact statements concurrently with and integrated with other environmental review laws and executive orders.” Each section in this chapter identifies all known and related actions specific to that resource. These are also identified in Chapter 1 of this document.