



Release Date: 11/25/14

Contacts: Donna Hummel, 505.954.2018
Adrian Garcia, 505.954.2199

BLM Releases Environmental Assessment on DOD Proposal to Run Segments of SunZia Southwest Transmission Line Underground

30-Day Period for Public Comments Begins on the BLM's Preliminary Finding of No New Significant Impact

Santa Fe, NM – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced today that it is seeking public input on an Environmental Assessment (EA) that analyzes mitigation efforts proposed by the Department of Defense (DOD) to place three segments of the SunZia Southwest Transmission Line Project underground to address overlap with military readiness and operations near White Sands Missile Range. The BLM has reached a preliminary Finding of No New Significant Impact (FONNSI) on the DOD proposal.

A Notice of Availability for the EA will be published in the Federal Register on Friday, November 28, 2014 and public comments for the project and the FONNSI will be accepted until December 28, 2014.

"The progress made today on the SunZia project reflects the strong partnership between the Department of Defense, the Department of the Interior, military installations in New Mexico, and the BLM," said BLM New Mexico State Director Jesse Juen. "The proposed mitigation measures will protect national security interests and increase access to previously stranded renewable energy resources in New Mexico."

The SunZia Southwest Transmission Line is one of the priority projects of the Obama Administration's Rapid Response Team for Transmission, which aims to improve the overall quality and timeliness of electric transmission infrastructure permitting. When built, these projects will help increase electric reliability, integrate new renewable energy into the grid, and save consumers money. In particular, the SunZia project expects to provide access to the abundant renewable energy resources in this region of the country and catalyze new renewable energy development.

SunZia Transmission, LLC proposes to construct, operate, and maintain two parallel overhead 500-kilovolt transmission lines on Federal, State, and private lands, extending from the proposed SunZia East Substation in Lincoln County, New Mexico, to the existing Pinal Central Substation in Pinal County, Arizona. If approved, the length of the transmission lines would range from 460 miles to more than 500 miles, depending on which of the analyzed route alignment alternatives is selected. The project has the potential to add 3,000 to 4,500 megawatts of electric capacity to the desert southwest region of the United States, increasing energy security for the Nation by providing access to currently stranded renewable energy resources in eastern New Mexico.

Following the BLM's publication of the Final EIS for the SunZia project in June 2013, the DOD identified issues with the Preferred Alternative corridor detailed in that analysis, citing potential impacts of the above-ground transmission line on military operations and readiness activities in a locale north of the White Sands Missile Range, known as the "call-up area." Specifically, DOD said the aboveground line would impact low-altitude training exercises and missile test launches.

On May 27, 2014, Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel sent a letter to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell proposing mitigation measures that, if adopted, would address the DOD's objections. In response to the DOD's proposed mitigation measures, the BLM prepared an EA to examine one of the proposed mitigation measures, i.e., placing three segments totaling about five miles of the line underground in the "call-up area." In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the EA examines whether this portion of the DOD's mitigation proposal represents a substantial change in the Preferred Action identified in the BLM's FEIS for the project or significant new circumstances or information relevant to environmental concerns and bearing on the Preferred Action or its impacts. The EA's scope is limited to analyzing the impacts of the portion of the DOD mitigation proposal related to the underground segments of the transmission line and therefore only those comments that relate to that measure will be considered.

Based on the EA announced today, the BLM has preliminarily concluded that the DOD mitigation proposal is not a substantial change from the Preferred Alternative and would not have new impacts significantly different from those analyzed in the 2013 Final EIS. Therefore, the BLM has reached a preliminary FONNSI and the agency would proceed with consideration of the Preferred Alternative identified in the SunZia Final EIS as modified by the DOD mitigation proposal. A draft unsigned preliminary FONNSI is attached to the EA for review.

The EA, Final EIS, and other information about the project, is available from the project website at <http://www.blm.gov/nm/sunzia> or by contacting the BLM Project Lead, Adrian Garcia at 505.954.2199.

Comments will be accepted on the EA until December 28, 2014. Comments may be submitted electronically at: NMSunZiaProject@blm.gov. Comments may also be submitted by mail to: Bureau of Land Management, New Mexico State Office, Attention: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, P.O. Box 27115, Santa Fe, NM 87502-0115. Please note that only those comments that relate to the Mitigation Proposal will be considered by the BLM as part of this comment period.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment - including your personal identifying information - may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Copies of the EA are available for public inspection on the BLM website at <http://www.blm.gov/nm/sunzia>. Copies are also available for public inspection at the following BLM locations:

- New Mexico State Office, 301 Dinosaur Trail, Santa Fe, NM 87502
- Socorro Field Office, 901 S. Highway 85, Socorro, NM 87801

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to manage and conserve the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations under our mandate of multiple-use and sustained yield. In Fiscal Year 2013, the BLM generated \$4.7 billion in receipts from public lands.

--BLM--