

**DECISION NOTICE**  
**and**  
**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**DONEY PARK 69kV TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT**  
**USDA Forest Service**  
**Peaks Ranger District, Coconino National Forest**  
**Coconino County, Arizona**

**DECISION**

Based on the Environmental Assessment (EA) completed for this project, as well as comments received during the 30-day public comment period for the completed EA, it is my decision to select Alternative 2 authorizing construction of a new 69kV transmission line between the existing Arizona Public Service Company (APS) Tuba City–Flagstaff 69kV transmission line and Highway 89, T22N, R6E, Section 16, following the existing Transwestern Natural Gas Pipeline..

This decision involves only the portion of the proposed transmission line that would be located within the boundaries of the Coconino National Forest (CNF). Other components of the project, including the Doney Park Substation, would be located on private land and would be authorized by Coconino County permitting processes. Because a segment of the proposed 69kV transmission line would be located on Forest Service land administered by CNF, the CNF has jurisdiction to grant a federal right-of-way to APS to construct, operate, and maintain that portion of the proposed transmission line.

Alternative 2 would include:

- Construction of approximately 1.75 miles of 69kV transmission line from US Highway 89 (US 89) to the existing APS Tuba City–Flagstaff 69kV transmission line using self-weathering steel poles, approximately 65 feet tall. The physical area affected would be approximately 9,240 feet in length x 40 feet wide/43,560 = 8.48 acres.
- Access to pole locations for excavation and installation is expected to be achieved primarily using existing access roads. Overland access may be required south of the existing AT&T facility; however, no new roads would be constructed.
- Vegetation clearing, as necessary, to maintain a 16-foot safety area on both sides of the overhead transmission line. Large trees would be removed prior to construction of the overhead line and the clearing of some natural shrub and grass vegetation may be required at pole sites. After construction, the removal of hazard trees adjacent to the right-of-way and maintenance of required vegetation clearances within the right-of-way corridor, including tree trimming and small vegetation (brush and grasses) clearing, would be an on-going maintenance activity, as needed, to secure transmission line reliability.

- Pre-framed poles would be transported to each pole site by truck and rigged with stringing sheaves to prepare for conductor installation. The poles would be placed upright by a rubber-tired boom truck and then backfilled.
- Tensioning and pulling sites for conductor installation will require an area of approximately 60 feet by 150 feet and would be located along the right-of-way to minimize impacts.
- Cleanup and reclamation of disturbed areas.

A crew of approximately seven people would be used to construct the transmission line for duration of three months. Construction vehicles would include conventional bucket trucks (2), line trucks (2), and hole diggers (2) with mounted augers. The duration of hole-digging activity is expected to be one week. The constructed 69kV transmission line would be inspected annually, or as required, using ground vehicles or on foot.

The transmission line route has been selected to avoid significant impacts to resources. Poles will be constructed of self-weathering steel structures and nonspecular conductors in order to reduce visual impacts. By using existing access roads, strategic placement of pole locations, and following Forest Service and APS Best Management Practices, resource impacts can be further reduced.

## **RATIONALE FOR THE DECISION**

The 1987 Coconino National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan provides for a multiple use management framework in which special uses are administered “to best meet public needs” (CNF 1987). The proposed project complies with standards and guidelines specified in the Forest Plan that are applicable to this type of use.

### **Background**

APS is the electric power supplier to the Doney Park/Timberline/Fernwood community, located approximately 3.5 miles north of Flagstaff city limits in Coconino County. APS serves approximately 7,000 customers in the Doney Park area, and expects their customer base to grow, based on historical growth records, to nearly 10,000 households by 2010. Currently, the Doney Park community is supplied with electricity from the Sandvig Substation, located in the northeast portion of the City of Flagstaff, approximately 6 miles south-southwest of the project area. APS has determined that without this project the existing Sandvig Substation could experience a 5 to 10 percent thermal overload as early as 2009, resulting in a variety of operating concerns, including the possibility of increased outages and insufficient voltage to the Doney Park community and accelerated degradation of the Sandvig Substation equipment. Should this overload occur APS may not be able to provide the reliable electric service necessary to meet the needs of existing residents and support continued growth in the area.

## **Purpose and Need for Action**

The electric power needs of APS' customers in the Doney Park/Timberline/Fernwood community have increased to a point that additional electric transmission facilities are required to ensure reliability and provide for continued growth in the area. The Environmental Assessment documents the analysis of the proposed action to meet this need.

The purpose of and need for the 69kV transmission line and associated substation is to accomplish the following:

- ensure reliable electric service to both existing and future area residents
- improve power quality in the area by providing a stable voltage source
- provide capacity for projected load growth in the Doney Park/Timberline/Fernwood area for meeting long-term needs
- prevent the projected overload on the existing Sandvig Substation

Approximately 1.75 miles of the proposed transmission line would be on CNF land. The purpose and need for action by the Forest Service is to identify a suitable corridor for the proposed facilities on CNF land, in order to facilitate the completion of this proposed project and to meet the management needs and requirements set forth in the Forest Plan.

## **Decision Rationale**

When compared to the no action alternative, the proposed action will meet the purpose and need for the project by improving power reliability and quality, providing capacity for projected future growth, and preventing the projected overload on the Sandvig Substation. The no action alternative would not meet the project purpose and need.

The proposed action meets requirements under the following laws:

- National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended
- National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended
- Clean Air Act of 1970, as amended
- Endangered Species Act of 1973
- Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974
- National Forest Management Act of 1976
- Clean Water Act of 1977
- American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978
- Archaeological Resource Protection Act of 1980
- Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993
- Executive Order 11593 (cultural resources)
- Executive Order 12898 (environmental justice)
- Executive Order 13186 (Migratory Bird Treaty Act)

The proposed transmission line is consistent with the management direction and multiple use management framework described in the CNF Plan (1987).

The list of mitigation measures displayed in the Environmental Assessment, Chapter 2-Alternatives will be applied when implementing this project to avoid and/or minimize environmental impact.

Access policy and road maintenance objectives are not changed as a result of this decision.

## **PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT**

The proposal to construct a new transmission line was listed in the CNF Schedule of Proposed Action (January 1, 2006 to March 31, 2006). In addition, APS sent a project newsletter to over 800 addresses, including area residents within 1 mile of the proposed project facilities, local representatives, and other interested parties. The project newsletter was distributed in mid January 2006 to agencies and the public, describing the project and providing information on the open house/scoping meeting. The project and open house/scoping meeting also were announced through display advertisements in the *Arizona Daily Sun* on January 25 and 29, 2006. A comment form and pre-stamped envelope were included in the newsletter; additional comment forms were available at the open house meeting. Comments were accepted by mail, electronic mail, telephone, and through a website maintained by APS.

The public open house/scoping meeting was conducted on January 31, 2006 to provide information and solicit public comments and suggestions regarding the proposed project. Informational handouts and comment forms were available at the public meeting to provide an opportunity for the attendees to review project details and submit comments at the meeting or by mail. A total of 15 comments were received through comment forms, e-mails, and phone calls.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, and tribes, the interdisciplinary team identified several issues regarding the effects of the proposed action. The main comments/concerns raised during scoping regarding project components on the CNF included concerns about biological resources (in particular, the spread of noxious weeds), cultural resources, recreational users and views, safety issues related to the proximity of the proposed transmission line to existing utilities, and public involvement. Comments regarding APS project components outside the CNF included concerns about project alternatives, land use, visual resources, cultural resources, and public involvement.

On August 11, 2006, a legal advertisement was published in the *Arizona Daily Sun* indicating that the Doney Park 69kV Transmission Line Project Environmental Assessment was available for a 30-day public review and comment period. Prior to the beginning of the comment period, a letter was sent to all individuals on the project mailing list indicating that the EA was available for review. Two e-mails and one phone message were received during the public comment period. The primary concern of these comments included the location and appearance of the proposed substation associated with this project, which is proposed on private land not a part of this decision. One comment noted the presence of an invasive weed species in the proposed

transmission line corridor. Project implementation will follow Best Management Practices in the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Integrated Treatment of Noxious or Invasive Weeds.

More information about the public involvement efforts can be found in the project record (available for viewing at the Peaks District Ranger Office).

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

In addition to the selected alternative (Alternative 2), 4 other alternatives were considered. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 2-1 through 2-5 and is summarized below.

### **Alternative 1 – No Action**

Under the No Action alternative, no electric utility improvements would be made. The existing 12kV distribution line would continue to serve the area. Current management plans would continue to guide management of the project area. The Doney Park/Timberline communities would continue to be vulnerable to extended outages, and additional demands on the area electricity grid would further jeopardize power reliability in the area. Under the No-Action Alternative, there would be no ground disturbance or resource impacts from the implementation of the alternative; however, the purpose and need for the project would not be met.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED AND ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY**

### **Alternative 3 – Alternative Generating Sources**

This alternative proposes the construction of additional generating and transmission facilities. Major facilities would have to be large enough to satisfy current and future load growth projections. Other generation facilities including distributive energy, solar, and wind were considered as alternatives. These facilities would require excessive capital costs and additional environmental impacts associated with developing expansive wind or solar fields. In addition, any new generation sources would require similar transmission facilities (including transmission lines) to those required for the Proposed Action. For these reasons, alternative generation sources were eliminated from further consideration.

### **Alternative 4 – Alternative Transmission Technologies**

Underground construction was considered as an alternate to overhead transmission line construction. Underground systems typically have been constructed under circumstances of short distances in which overhead lines are not feasible (e.g., in the vicinity of airports, urban centers). Underground line construction is often preferable to overhead lines due to reduced visual impacts after installation. However, the clearing, excavation, and access road construction associated with underground construction will create some temporary visual impacts.

For this particular project, underground construction would require a trench 6 feet deep, 3 to 3.5 feet wide and 2 miles long. Although overhead construction would require tree removal, underground construction would require a similar number of trees to be removed in addition to the removal of smaller vegetation and grasses during construction and maintenance activities. It is important to note that underground construction would reduce but not eliminate the presence of overhead structures, as four “dip” or transition poles (two at each end of the underground segment) would be required. Due to the proximity of these structures to US 89, it is likely that visual impacts to travelers near the dip poles would be comparable to those experienced for overhead construction.

Underground lines are vulnerable to washouts and incidental excavation. Outages for underground lines, while less frequent, generally take much longer to repair. Outages could last for several days while the problem is being located and repaired. Repair of an underground cable fault would require excavation to perform the repair, thus creating additional ground disturbance (and requiring further revegetation). Overhead lines suffer outages more often, but are usually corrected within hours and with less overall ground disturbance.

APS’ experience, as well as that of other utilities, shows that costs for an underground 69kV transmission line, including those associated with cable, trenching, and conduit, may run up to 10 times higher than an equivalent overhead line. In addition, generally the burden of funding the additional costs associated with underground transmission lines is placed upon the party or parties requiring such actions. Although underground lines are less likely to be affected by weather, maintenance costs are typically greater than the equivalent overhead lines, since outages are more difficult to locate and repair. Due primarily to these issues of cost, undergrounding the proposed transmission line route, or portions of it, was eliminated from further study.

### **Alternative 5 – Alternative Transmission Line Routes and Substation Sites**

Two alternative transmission line routes were considered and eliminated. The first alternative originated at the proposed Doney Park Substation, crossed US 89, turned south, and continued down US 89 for approximately 0.5 mile on the western side of the highway. The route then turned west and continued along the established utility corridor on Forest Service land for approximately 1.5 miles. However, a number of trees near the edge of US 89 would need to be removed, thus increasing the view of the utility corridor from US 89. As a result of this concern, this alternative was eliminated from further consideration.

A second route was considered within the utility corridor which would place the transmission line between the two Transwestern gas pipelines. Transwestern provided a letter (Appendix D of the EA) outlining their concerns associated with this alternative. The following items represent issues or concerns that resulted in the elimination of this alignment from further consideration.

- Construction vehicles would be operating (driving, parking, lifting) on top of the existing gas lines, potentially creating stresses and loads on the line that were not anticipated or designed for during construction of the lines. These stresses could accelerate pipeline degradation or create damage that could ultimately result in failure of the line.

- Once the line is constructed, APS maintenance crews would need access to all of the pole locations. Since the existing access/patrol road is up to 60 feet from the center of the two gas lines, new maintenance spur roads or overland travel would be needed to access pole locations during construction and maintenance. In addition, to avoid the concerns mentioned above, where the maintenance roads would cross the northern pipeline, the crossing would need to be reinforced to withstand standard highway vehicle loads over the top of the gas line.
- In the event that maintenance was required on either the north or the south gas pipeline, the electrical line would need to be taken out of service. In addition to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements for clearance, the trenches necessary to excavate the pipeline also could disturb the pole foundations, requiring shoring of the excavation, guying of the poles, or other safety-related measures.
- Induced current on the pipeline is a concern anytime an electric utility is in proximity to a metallic utility, and this option puts both the in and out circuit nearly over the top of the gas lines. While it is possible to model the induced current and determine the amount of mitigation necessary to bleed off the current, this configuration represents additions to the pipeline and monitoring requirements that are two to three times greater than those required by other configurations.

In addition to maintenance and construction concerns, it was determined that this alternative would potentially have higher concerns, regarding visual resources, by placing an overhead structure centered within a previously cleared area, increasing project visibility from US 89 and to dispersed recreational users in the corridor, in comparison to the other alternatives. Although no tree clearing would be required for this alternative, it would still require vegetation (brush and grasses) clearing for construction and for any maintenance activities required.

In general, the possibility of siting the proposed substation on Forest Service land was considered. The proposed substation site is currently planned for a parcel of land that APS has owned since 1987, with the intent to build a substation. The land is intentionally located in close proximity to a distribution line, which currently serves the local community. Locating the substation on an alternate site on Forest Service land could create additional environmental impacts, in particular on visual, biological, and archeological resources due to additional tree removal, possible disturbance of archeological sites, and improvements to access roads for construction and maintenance. In addition, a 12kV distribution line would need to be constructed from the substation to connect with distribution lines serving the local community, which would still require a separate utility corridor through Forest Service and/or private land. The proposed substation is consistent with the neighborhood commercial development occurring along US 89, minimizes disturbance to Forest Service lands, and serves the purpose and need of the project, therefore, the CNF, in accordance with Forest Service policy (Forest Service Special Uses Handbook 2709.11, Chapter 10), does not support locating the substation in an alternative location on Forest Service lands.

For the above reasons, alternative transmission line routes and siting the substation on Forest Service land were eliminated from further study.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

### **Endangered Species Act of 1973**

Biological Evaluations were completed for sensitive plants and animals. No sensitive species will experience impacts that would cause or contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

### **Clean Air Act**

Construction of the facilities and roads, including site preparation and clearing will be in accordance with provisions of the Clean Air Act as administered by the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality.

### **National Historic Preservation Act of 1966**

The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act includes locating, inventorying, and evaluating the National Register potential for cultural sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. In consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office it has been determined that there will be no effect to cultural resources by the construction and maintenance of the transmission line on National Forest System land. The State Historic Preservation Office also requires the consideration of the potential effects from the construction and operation of the Doney Park Substation on private (APS) land. The Doney Park Cabin Site will be protected and avoided by the project until testing or additional information becomes available that would allow a conclusive determination of National Register eligibility to be made. Should test excavations find intact subsurface remains, additional consultation with the SHPO, and perhaps additional excavations, would be necessary to mitigate project impacts to the Doney Cabin Site.

### **Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)**

This activity will not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and will not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990.

### **Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)**

In accordance with Executive Order 12898 this project does not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low-income populations.

### **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended in 1986**

This project will have no adverse effects to any wild and scenic rivers.

## **Clean Water Act of 1977 as amended**

This activity will not impact the functional value or compromise the quality of any rivers, streams or riparian areas. Mitigation measures will be in place as discussed in the Environmental Assessment, Chapter 2-*Alternatives*.

## **FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

The Environmental Assessment for this project was reviewed using criteria identified in implementing regulations for the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR 1508.27).

### **Context**

This project is a site-specific action that by itself does not have international, national, region-wide or statewide importance. The context of this action is that approximately 8.5 acres of CNF lands will be modified to construct the transmission line. Within the CNF, impacts will be limited to the transmission line right-of-way and immediate surrounding forest land.

The discussion of the significance criteria that follows applies to the intended action analyzed within the Doney Park 69kV Transmission Line Project Environmental Assessment.

### **Intensity**

The following discussion is organized around criteria described in the National Policy Act (NEPA) regulations (40 CFE 1508.27).

### **Beneficial and Adverse Impacts**

This action will avoid any impacts of significant intensity. Implementation of mitigation measures will minimize impacts (EA-Chapter 2).

There may be short-term minor traffic effects on US 89 as construction progresses due to increased heavy equipment use in the area. There will be short-term soil displacement as the area is cleared and the site prepared. No impacts are anticipated to occur to area grazing activities.

A portion of the proposed project would occur within lands designated as a Retention VQO, adjacent to and for approximately 0.5 mile west of US 89. The CNF has reviewed the specific conditions and determined that the proposed project would not meet the objective of the designated Retention VQO, but rather a Partial Retention VQO. However, the Proposed Action will not require a plan amendment, since the CNF may determine that a given action can be in compliance with overall visual management goals even if a proposed localized condition deviates from a broadly defined VQO designation. The action would be in compliance with the Forest Service visual quality objective designation of Partial Retention within the existing pipeline corridor where the proposed 69kV transmission line would be located in a landscape previously modified during construction of the existing pipelines and 69kV transmission line.

The long-term effects are considered to be beneficial in terms of increased power supply and reliability for the communities of Doney Park, Timberline, and Fernwood, in addition to strengthening the overall 69kV system in the area.

### **Public Health and Safety**

There are no known adverse impacts to public safety. During construction, traffic caution signs will be posted at critical locations along US 89.

### **Unique Characteristics**

There are no unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas that would be adversely affected. Four previously recorded cultural sites were identified but any potential adverse effects can be avoided by spanning or mitigated through archeological testing and/or data recovery.

### **Controversy**

The public generally supports the project and understands the project need. The effects of this action are widely understood and are not considered controversial among resource specialists. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial.

### **Uncertainty and Risk**

The degree of possible effects on the human environment is not highly uncertain, nor are there unique risks involved. Effects are discussed in the EA-Chapter 3.

### **Precedent**

These site-specific actions do not establish a precedent for future actions, which may have significant effects; nor does it represent a decision in principle about a future consideration. The proposal is consistent with standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan. Future actions will be evaluated through the NEPA process and will stand on their own as to the environmental effects and project feasibility.

### **Cumulative Effects**

Past and present actions have been analyzed and considered and found to be not significant. Cumulative effects have been discussed and disclosed in the EA-Chapter 3.

### **Significant Scientific, Cultural or Historic Resources**

This decision will not contribute to the loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historic resources. A cultural resources survey and report (CNF Project No. 2006-29-A) is complete. The survey identified four previously recorded sites. Two sites are located on Forest Service lands, a field house and the Greenlaw North Logging Railroad, and two other sites are on private land, US Highway 89 and the

Doney Cabin Site. No new sites were recorded. Of the two sites on Forest land, the potentially affected portion of the field house site has previously been mitigated by archaeological testing and clearance approval for the Transwestern Pipeline. The segment of the Greenlaw North Railroad in the project area has previously been determined to be a non-contributing element of the site that does not need protection or mitigation. Of the two sites on private land, the segment of US 89 Highway 89 has also been previously determined to be a non-contributing element, needing no further protection or mitigation. The Doney Cabin Site, located within the APS substation, will be protected until testing or additional information is available that would allow a conclusive determination of eligibility to be made. Should it be necessary to test the site for eligibility, or should data recovery be necessary, an acceptable mitigation program would be determined in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. Given the amount of archaeological survey work that has been done in and around the Area of Potential Effect, it is unlikely that additional cultural resources will be encountered. However, should new resources not previously identified be encountered during construction, work would stop immediately and the District Ranger and Forest Archaeologist notified to determine an appropriate course of action.

The project is located within, but will not impact, the San Francisco Peaks Traditional Cultural Property.

### **Threatened and Endangered Species**

This decision will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species of plants or animals or habitat critical for the management of these species. This action does not violate Federal, State, or local laws imposed for the protection of the environment. A biological assessment and evaluation has not been completed.

Implementing Alternative 2 does not constitute a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment in either context or intensity. I have made this determination after considering both positive and negative effects, as well as direct, indirect and cumulative effects of this action and foreseeable future actions and, therefore, the action does not require the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement.

### **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

This project will not be implemented sooner than five business days following the close of the appeal filing period established in the Decision Notice in the *Arizona Daily Sun*.

If an appeal is filed, implementation will not begin sooner than 15 calendar days following a final decision on the appeal. APS plans to complete construction of the project by spring 2009.

## **RIGHT TO APPEAL OR ADMINSTRATIVE REVIEW**

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Appeal Deciding Officer:

**Regional Forester  
Southwest Region  
333 Broadway, S. E.  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102**

The Notice of Appeal must be filed within 45 days of publication of notice of this decision in the *Arizona Daily Sun*.

In accordance with 36 CFR Section 215.14, it is the responsibility of those who appeal a decision to provide the Appeal Deciding Officer sufficient evidence and rationale to show why the Responsible Official's decision should be remanded or reversed. The written notice of appeal must meet the following requirements:

- State that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to CFR part 215.
- List the name, address and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identify the decision document by title and subject, date of decision, and name and title of the Responsible Official.
- Identify the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks or portion of the decision to which the appellant objects.
- State how the Responsible Official's decision fails to consider comments previously provided before the close of the comment period specified in 36 CFR 215.6 and, if applicable, how the appellant believes the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.

## **CONTACT PERSON**

For more information concerning this decision, please contact Ken Jacobs, Peaks and Mormon Lake Ranger District Lands Staff, 928-214-2464.

**/s/ NORA B. RASURE  
Coconino National Forest Supervisor**

**January 22, 2007**