

# Record of Categorical Exclusion for

## Wind Tests of Transmission Line Towers

ON Line Nevada Transmission Project, f.k.a Southwest Intertie Project – South

### **Description of Proposed Action:**

The Department of Energy (DOE) proposed action is to support the temporary erection and monitoring of transmission line towers being used for the One Nevada Transmission Line Project (ON Line), formerly known as the Southwest Intertie Project – South, using loan guaranteed funds. The ON Line project consists of a 500-kilovolt (kV) transmission line that will run 235 miles from Ely, Nevada to just North of Las Vegas and will require approximately 860 transmission towers. The ON Line project is the first 600 MW phase of a larger project that when completed is expected to carry approximately 2000 MW of electricity generated by wind and solar resources in Wyoming, Idaho and Nevada to power the Southwest and California markets. In the early phases of construction several of the towers erected for the transmission line in Nevada suffered damage from wind related vibration. Tests are required to help identify and test the effectiveness of mitigation measures to prevent any future damage to the towers.

The wind tests would take place at a site west of Lubbock, Texas, on former Reese Air Force Base property that is now leased by Texas Tech University for their Wind Science and Engineering Research Center. Many similar wind tests on various tower structures (e.g., meteorological towers, wind turbines) have been performed at the site, and the area is highly disturbed. The Center offers a suitable off-site environment for testing transmission towers that must sustain the effects of high winds and wind-related vibration. Based on historical wind data, sustained high winds are more likely to occur at the Center's site than at ON Line's Nevada location during the months in which the testing is scheduled – March through June.

During the testing, strakes and secondary guy and span wires will be installed with the intent to stabilize the towers and minimize wind-related vibration during a range of wind conditions. Detailed test data would be gathered and analyzed to determine the performance, suitability and effectiveness of the tested mitigation measures under these wind conditions. The results from the testing are expected to help to determine the most effective modification for all of the ON Line transmission towers.

A DOE loan guarantee for financing the ON Line project was issued in February 2011, to Great Basin Transmission, LLC (Great Basin). The loan guarantee was authorized under title XVII of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. A DOE Record of Decision (ROD) for the conditional commitment to issue the loan guarantee for ON Line was published in the *Federal Register* on October 26, 2010. DOE prepared the ROD in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR parts 1500-1508) for implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures (10 CFR Part 1021).

### **Number and Title of Categorical Exclusion:**

The temporary erection and monitoring of ON Line transmission test towers that is proposed to be conducted using loan guaranteed funds is consistent with and covered by categorical exclusion B4.6. The full text of the categorical exclusion is as follows:

B4.6, as provided in 10 CFR § 1021, Appendix B to Subpart D: Additions or modifications to electric power transmission facilities within a previously disturbed or developed facility area. Covered activities include, but are not limited to, switchyard rock grounding upgrades, secondary containment projects, paving projects, seismic upgrading, tower modifications, load shaping projects (such as the installation and use of flywheels and battery arrays), changing insulators, and replacement of poles, circuit breakers, conductors, transformers, and crossarms.

### **Regulatory Requirements defined in 10 CFR § 1021.410 (b):**

The loan guarantee and related actions described above were subjected to an environmental due diligence review by DOE Loan Programs Office (LPO) staff to ensure they are consistent with the specific categories of actions (categorical exclusions) contained in Appendix B of 10 CFR Part 1021 and the conditions for applying categorical exclusions specified in Section 410 of Part 1021. To ensure that the requirements of Appendix B were met, LPO Environmental Compliance Division staff reviewed information submitted by Great Basin on March 8, 2012, and other descriptive information provided in email exchanges and telephone conversations between LPO staff and ON Line representatives. In addition to the environmental documentation reviewed, two site visits by LPO staff were conducted on November 14 – 15, 2011, and February 12 – 15, 2012. The process for assembling and erecting transmission line towers and the extent of associated ground disturbing activities were observed, among other things, during those visits. The results of the environmental due diligence review produced the following findings:

- The project does not threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory or permit requirements for environmental, safety and health, including DOE and /or Executive Orders;
- The project does not require siting, construction, or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities;
- The proposed action is not a connected action as set forth in 40 CFR § 1508.25(a)(2)); and
- The proposed action is not part of a DOE proposal for which an EIS is being prepared and therefore a categorical exclusion is not precluded by 40 CFR § 1506.1 or 10 CFR § 1021.211.

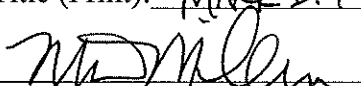
The environmental due diligence review also determined that the proposed project associated with the loan guarantee does not adversely affect any environmentally sensitive resources, including the following:

- Property of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance designated by Federal, state, or local governments or property eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places;
- Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat (including critical habitat), Federally-proposed or candidate species or their habitat, or state-listed endangered species or their habitat;
- Wetlands regulated under the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344) and floodplains; or
- Special sources of water (such as sole source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources) that are vital in a region.

The Comment section below is provided for any necessary clarifications concerning the findings listed above. Signature by Great Basin's designated representative in the Corporate Validation section is an indication of Great Basin's concurrence with the findings and determinations presented above.

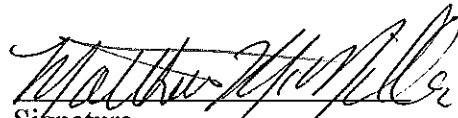
**Comment:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**Corporate Validation:**

Name and Title (Print): MARY D. MILBURN, Asst. V.P.  
Signature:  Date: 3/13/12

**Determination:**

Based on my review of information conveyed to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as prescribed by DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed loan guarantee and associated actions involve no extraordinary circumstances (10 CFR 1021.410(b)) and fit within the specified category of actions in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021 described above, and are hereby categorically excluded from further review under the National Environmental Policy Act (42 USC 4321, as amended).

  
Signature  
Matthew McMillen  
NEPA Compliance Officer  
Loan Programs Office

3-14-12  
Date