

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
WESTERN AREA POWER ADMINISTRATION  
UPPER GREAT PLAINS CUSTOMER SERVICE REGION**

**FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**Fairview West to Spring Lake Transmission Project  
Richland County, Montana  
DOE/EA-1612**

**AGENCY:** Western Area Power Administration, DOE

**ACTION:** Finding of No Significant Impact

**SUMMARY:** The Lower Yellowstone Rural Electric Association (LYREA) has requested to interconnect their proposed new 27-mile-long Fairview West to Spring Lake 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line and new Spring Lake Substation (Project) to the Western Area Power Administration's (Western) transmission system. The Project would interconnect with Western's Richland-Williston 115-kV transmission system at a proposed new Fairview West Switchyard. In addition, the environmental review considered the effects of a future substation connecting the proposed Fairview West-Spring Lake transmission line to the existing LYREA Sioux Pass-Girard 69-kV transmission line at a future Nine Mile Substation. The entire Project would be located in Richland County, Montana.

Under its Open Access Transmission Service Tariff (Tariff), Western is required to respond to LYREA's interconnection request. Western's Tariff conforms to Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) Final Orders 888, 888A, 888B, and 888C and provides for new interconnections to Western's transmission system by all eligible entities, consistent with Western requirements and subject to environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other environmental regulations. Western's decision is to approve or disapprove the interconnection of the Project with Western's transmission system. Western's approval of this interconnection would require execution of an interconnection agreement, and Western would need to construct, own, operate, and maintain the proposed new Fairview West Switchyard, where the LYREA Project would terminate. LYREA would construct, own, operate, and maintain the Fairview West-Spring Lake transmission line and the new Spring Lake Substation.

In accordance with applicable regulations, Western prepared an environmental assessment (EA) entitled *Fairview West to Spring Lake Transmission Project* (DOE/EA-1612). The EA identified and evaluated the potential environmental impacts associated with Western's decision on the interconnection request, the new Fairview West Substation, and LYREA's Project. In addition to addressing Western's Federal action, the EA evaluated four alternative transmission line routes, two system alternatives, alternative tap and substation sites, and a No Action Alternative. Mitigation measures to minimize environmental impacts were included as integral parts of the proposed Project. The EA identified no potentially significant impacts to environmental resources.

The Pre-decisional EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on September 5, 2008. No comments were received during the 30-day public review and comment period, and no changes were made to the Pre-decisional EA. The Pre-decisional EA as circulated for public and agency comment is Western's Final EA.

Based on the information contained in the EA, Western has determined that approval of the interconnection request and LYREA's proposed Project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI).

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Additional information and copies of the EA and this FONSI are available to all interested parties and the public from the following contact:

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**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:** This FONSI was prepared in accordance with Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for Implementing the Procedural Provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, 40 CFR 1508.13, and the DOE NEPA Implementing Procedures, 10 CFR 1021.322.

The FONSI briefly presents the reasons why Western's proposal to approve an interconnection agreement for the Fairview West to Spring Lake Transmission Project, including the described impact mitigation measures outlined in the EA, will not have a significant impact on the human environment. Approval of the interconnection agreement would allow LYREA to interconnect their proposed new Fairview West to Spring Lake 115-kV transmission line and new Spring Lake Substation to Western's transmission system via a new Fairview West Switchyard. In

accordance with the regulations cited above, Western prepared an EA entitled *Fairview West to Spring Lake Transmission Project* (DOE/EA-1612) on Western's action and on LYREA's Project. The EA identifies and evaluates the potential environmental impacts associated with Western's decision on the interconnection agreement and related Fairview West Switchyard and of the proposed Project. The entire EA is incorporated by reference into this FONSI in accordance with 40 CFR 1508.13, which allows a summary discussion in this document.

Prior to making a decision to approve the interconnection of LYREA's Project, Western is required to prepare an EA to address NEPA and related environmental requirements. The EA examines the potential environmental effects of approving the application for interconnection as well as the No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, Western would not approve the interconnection request and would not construct the Fairview West Switchyard. For purposes of providing a no-project environmental baseline, the No Action Alternative also assumes that LYREA's proposed Project would also not be constructed. The EA also analyzes the potential environmental impacts of constructing, operating, and maintaining the Fairview West to Spring Lake transmission line and Spring Lake Substation and a potential future Nine Mile Substation. In addition to LYREA's proposed Project, the EA evaluated four other potential transmission line routes along with the No Action Alternative.

**WESTERN'S ACTION:** Western must decide whether to approve or disapprove LYREA's interconnection request. Under its Tariff, Western is required to respond to an applicant's interconnection request and offer access to capacity on its transmission system when capacity is available, and on a non-discriminatory basis. Western's Tariff conforms to FERC Final Orders 888, 888A, 888B, and 888C and provides for new interconnections to Western's transmission system by all eligible entities, consistent with Western requirements and subject to environmental review under NEPA and other environmental regulations.

Western also needs to ensure that by offering such capacity, existing transmission system reliability and service is not degraded by new interconnections. Transmission system studies are conducted to determine the effects on power flows in the event interconnection requests are approved. The applicant's objectives are also considered in Western's decision process. Western's decision is to approve or disapprove the interconnection of the Project with Western's transmission system. The FERC Orders direct that interconnection requests be approved unless the transmission system would be adversely affected by the interconnection. Western's approval of this interconnection would require execution of an interconnection agreement, and Western would need to construct, own, operate, and maintain the proposed new Fairview West Switchyard where the LYREA Project would terminate. LYREA would construct, own, operate, and maintain the Fairview West-Spring Lake transmission line and the new Spring Lake Substation.

The Fairview West site is owned by Western and is non-native pasture. Approximately 2.6 acres of the site would be graded, graveled, and fenced. Three 115-kV circuit breakers would be installed, to which the three phases of the proposed Fairview West to Spring Lake 115-kV transmission line would connect. The developed substation area would include open space within

the perimeter fence for additional equipment should increases in electrical load require future expansion. The Fairview West Switchyard would require a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for stormwater runoff. An additional 5.0 acres at the site would be temporarily disturbed by use for vehicle parking, construction staging, equipment and supplies storage, and related construction activities. This area would revert to pasture land after construction was completed.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:** LYREA would construct a new 115-kV transmission line, generally oriented east to west and approximately 27 miles long, between Western's new Fairview West Switchyard and a new Spring Lake Substation. The Fairview West Switchyard would contain three 115-kV circuit breakers to facilitate the transmission line interconnection on the east end of the project. The new Spring Lake Substation would be constructed on the west end of the project alignment. The substation would provide a 115 to 24.9/12.47-kV service outlet to meet power demands on the western end of the project. The project includes a potential future Nine Mile Substation and six temporary material storage areas along the alignment. The transmission line route is adjacent to the right-of-way (ROW) for County Highway 201.

Construction of the transmission line, which would consist mostly of two-pole wooden H-frame structures with anchor facilities, would temporarily disrupt approximately 600 square feet of ground cover for each pole structure. Single poles would be used in certain circumstances, but span lengths would decrease from 600-800 feet to around 300 feet in those areas. The transmission line ROW would be 50 to 80 feet wide, depending on whether single-pole or H-frame structures are being used. Structure heights would vary between 65 and 100 feet tall. The total acres of ground disturbance for placement of the pole structures would be about 8.6 acres. Minimal clearing is expected because the transmission line will be primarily constructed in cultivated agriculture fields and pastures. In some isolated cases, grading may be necessary at structure locations to provide a level working area. The proposed transmission line follows an existing highway and would not require any cross-country segments. The total permanent disturbance associated with pole placement would about 0.1 acre.

Construction of the Spring Lake Substation and Nine Mile Substation would require temporary disturbance totaling about 2.8 acres, consisting of about 2.0 and 0.8 acres, respectively. The permanent area that would be impacted by operation and maintenance of these facilities would total about 1.6 acres, consisting of about 0.8 acre each. The Spring Lake and Nine Mile substations would not require an NPDES permit for stormwater runoff; however, best management practices (BMP) would be utilized to ensure disturbed areas would not be exposed to erosion or runoff at the site.

Most of the material required for construction of the transmission line would be delivered to the six temporary material storage areas located along the alignment. Although not all of these areas may be used, if they are, the total acreage potentially impacted by all sites would be about 4.5 acres.

**PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT:** LYREA held a public meeting on October 25, 2007, with landowners in the area of the proposed Project. The purpose of the meeting was to present

the proposed Project to the potentially affected landowners and answer any questions they might have about the Project. Once the NEPA process was under way, Western hosted an open-house public scoping meeting, with appropriate advertising and direct mailings, on February 12, 2008, in Sidney, Montana. Comments or questions at the public scoping meeting were directed toward transmission line location and alternatives; farming around structures; compensation and land values; distribution from the proposed line and the potential for under-building distribution lines on the transmission line; noise; potential health effects; and possible interference with radio, TV, and GPS devices. Western addressed these concerns in the EA.

**COMMENTS RECEIVED ON THE PRE-DECISIONAL EA:** The Pre-decisional EA was distributed to interested agencies, tribes, groups, and individuals on September 5, 2008, for review and comment. No comments were received during the 30-day public review and comment period. Since no comment were received, and no changes have been made to the Pre-decisional EA, the Pre-decisional EA as circulated for public and agency comment is Western's Final EA.

**ALTERNATIVES:** LYREA identified several routing and system alternatives to the proposed Project. These are discussed in detail in the EA in section 2.5. Potential alternatives were evaluated in terms of meeting the purpose and need for the Project, consistency with planned and anticipated system needs, meeting design and reliability standards, and impacts on environmentally-sensitive resources. In addition, alternatives needed to be reasonable, technically feasible, and economically viable.

LYREA identified a Culbertson Alternative with two route alternatives, a Brockton Alternative with two associated system alternatives, and a Richland Alternative. Each of these alternatives would require taps or substations in different location on existing lines. The No Action Alternative was also considered. None of the identified alternatives were found to be entirely reasonable, technically feasible, or economically viable for various reasons, with some requiring substantial upstream system upgrades in order to be functional. Initial analysis also disclosed potentially significant impacts with some alternatives, such as crossings of the Missouri River avoided by the proposed Project, and none offered substantive environmental or economic benefits warranting detailed investigation. For these reasons, the route, substation, and systems alternatives were not carried forward for detailed analysis in the EA.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF WESTERN'S ACTION:** Western's Federal action is to consider approval of LYREA's interconnection application and, if approved, Western would be committed to construct, own, operate, and maintain the proposed Fairview West Switchyard. The Fairview West Switchyard would require the temporary disturbance of 5.0 acres of land, and long-term occupation of 2.6 acres. All impacts to environmental resources from Western's Federal action would be restricted to the Fairview West site; the environmental impacts of LYREA's proposed Project are discussed below in detail.

Construction, operation, and maintenance of the Fairview West Switchyard would not affect recreation, geology and paleontology, environmental justice, or cultural resources. Soil erosion impacts would be minimized by BMP and the provisions of the NPDES permit. Vehicle emissions

and fugitive dust would occur during construction of the switchyard but would be short term and minimized by dust suppression measures as necessary. No surface water bodies or wetlands are found on the site, and soil erosion measures will prevent material from leaving the switchyard site and entering surface waters. Approximately 2.6 acres of non-native pasture land would be permanently lost to production, a negligible amount when compared to available pasture in the Project area. The 5.0 acres of pasture temporarily impacted would rapidly recover, aided by surface restoration and re-seeding as required. Wildlife would relocate during the construction period and return to the temporarily disturbed area following construction, but 2.6 acres of habitat would be permanently lost. Construction would not occur during the April 15-June 15 bird nesting season. No federally-listed species are found on the site, and the switchyard would not pose a hazard to migrating whooping cranes. None of the habitat types for State species of concern identified by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MFWP) are present on the Fairview West Switchyard site.

Construction of the switchyard would result in a small, temporary, positive impact on socioeconomics. Land use on the site would change from open pasture to utility industrial, but the small amount of land involved makes this change insignificant, and the facility would be in compliance with applicable land use plans and ordinances. The Fairview West Switchyard would cause a localized visual impact along County Highway 201. Given the amount of similar viewsheds in the area and the relatively small size of the facility, the visual impact would be apparent, but less than significant. Noise would be generated during construction of the switchyard, but would be temporary, and the location is remote with no nearby receptors. The switchyard would generate a low level of noise when in operation, but with no nearby receptors there would be no effect.

Health and safety issues during construction would be managed by compliance with applicable worker safety laws and regulations. As with all construction activities, there would still be a risk of worker injuries, but the risk should be low. Health and safety issues for residents include electrocution hazards, stray voltages, electric and magnetic fields, and intentional destructive acts. Electrocution hazards would be minimized by fencing and signage around the switchyard and compliance with utility industry standards for clearances and grounding. Severe weather could cause damage to the transmission line and allow conductors to reach the ground. Grounding would cause substation relays to trip, de-energizing the line and rendering it safe. Stray voltages, induced currents, and nuisance contact shocks are well understood and would be avoided by proper grounding of the transmission line and of large metallic objects near the transmission line, such as fences. The possible effects of electric and magnetic fields have been debated by researchers for over 30 years and as yet no cause/effect relationship has been demonstrated. Field levels would drop to background levels within 100 feet of the switchyard fence, and there are no residences nearby. Intentional destructive acts would likely be confined to random vandalism, such as equipment damage or theft of metals. The switchyard would be fenced, but there is little that can be done to completely protect the facility from determined thieves and vandals. The effects of an outage would be localized and would not result in major system disruptions. None of the health and safety issues would be of concern providing applicable laws and standard utility practices are followed.

Several future power generation and transmission projects in the region are identified in section 3.5.2 of the EA but all are some distance away from the Fairview West Switchyard site and would not contribute to cumulative impacts from the switchyard. Oil and gas development of the Bakken field could, however, occur in proximity to the proposed switchyard, but exact locations and scope of these future developments are not known. This information is generally confidential and proprietary, is still being defined, or is subject to further analysis. At the time the EA was circulated for comment, oil was over \$120.00 a barrel; as this FONSI is finalized it has fallen to around \$40.00. Oil and gas development is closely tied to prices, and it is anticipated that low or fluctuating prices will result in comparatively less development. Wells require power for the pumps, so distribution feeds to well sites will be required as wells are developed. In general, the agricultural, low population character of the area will likely be slightly changed by the yet-to-be-determined level of oil and gas development. The changes are not expected to be significant in a cumulative sense.

**Summary:** The EA identified no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to the human environment that would result from the construction, operation, and maintenance of Western's proposed Fairview West Switchyard.

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF LYREA'S PROJECT:** The EA evaluated the potential for LYREA's Project to impact environmental resources found in the Project area. LYREA incorporated mitigation measures and BMP in the description of its proposed Project. The analysis of environmental impacts identified no potential impacts that would be considered significant and no mitigation measures that should be implemented additional to those already embedded within the Project description. The principal reasons for the lack of significant environmental impact was the avoidance of sensitive resources during siting of the transmission line and substations, the minor amount of disturbance at structure locations, and LYREA's efforts to work cooperatively with affected landowners.

**Recreation:** LYREA's Project would not affect hunting or snowmobiling, the predominant recreational activities in the Project area.

**Geology and Paleontology:** There are no areas of geologic instability in the Project area, and risk of seismic activity is low. A review of existing information revealed no known paleontological resources that could be affected.

**Soils:** Soils in the Project area consist of loams, silt loams, and clay loams. Construction of the transmission line would temporarily disturb approximately 8.6 acres, and permanently impact 0.1 acre. Construction of the Spring Lake Substation would temporarily disturb 2.0 acres and permanently impact 0.8 acres. If constructed in the future, the Nine Mile Substation would permanently impact an additional 0.8 acre. Typical construction BMP for minimizing erosion (e.g., silt fencing, straw bales, mulching, re-seeding, etc.) would be employed to reduce disturbance impacts. The amount of land permanently impacted by the Project is very small. No substantive impacts to soil are expected.

**Air Resources:** Air resources would be temporarily impacted by vehicle and equipment emissions and fugitive dust during construction activities. Neither National nor State Ambient Air Quality Standards would be exceeded. Emission and dust levels would be low and any impact minor and temporary.

**Water Resources and Water Quality:** Ten streams and several intermittent streams would be spanned by the transmission line. Thirteen wetlands are found within the ROW, mostly associated with streams. They are typically seasonally flooded, and some are created or modified by earthen dams to create livestock ponds. Many of these have been affected by agricultural practices or by cattle grazing and trampling. LYREA's Project would span or avoid surface water features in the ROW. BMP as described under Soils would prevent or minimize erosion and any deposition in surface waters. Refueling would not occur near surface waters, and spill kits would be available for any accidental spills. The Project would not affect groundwater.

**Vegetation:** Most of the vegetation in the Project area consists of agricultural row crops and pastureland. Some grasslands in the area meet certain criteria to be considered native prairie remnants. Native prairie remnants, wetlands, and woodlots/shelterbelts together make up a small percentage of the area. The County Highway 201 ROW paralleled by the transmission line route has been planted with smooth brome by the Montana Department of Transportation. Since the line and substations would be located adjacent to the highway ROW and cross previously disturbed agricultural and pasture lands, minimal impacts to vegetation resources are anticipated. No sensitive vegetation communities would be affected by LYRES's Project, primarily since drainages and wetland areas would be spanned.

**Wildlife:** Wildlife present in the Project area includes mammals, songbirds, raptors, waterfowl, and upland game birds common to the upper Great Plains. A listing of the individual species is provided in section 3.3.2.1 of the EA. The lands the proposed Project would affect are nearly entirely devoted to active agriculture or pasture and are not high-quality wildlife habitat, and the amount of land permanently removed from production is small. Temporary disturbance would be limited to no more than a year with the BMP in place. Construction activities would displace individuals temporarily, but they would be of very short duration in any given location, and wildlife would return to the area soon after construction was completed. Nesting birds could be affected by construction activities, but LYREA plans to avoid construction during the April 15-June 15 nesting season, so there would be no impact on nesting birds. No discernable impacts to wildlife habitat are therefore expected.

Avian collisions and raptor electrocution could occur after the transmission line is constructed. LYREA plans to install bird flight diverters near wetland habitats in accordance with discussions with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). These measures would reduce the bird collision potential and, while some losses are inevitable, the losses would not be significant or affect populations. LYREA's transmission line will meet Avian Power Line Interaction Committee guidelines to minimize electrocution risk to raptors. The new transmission line will provide additional hunting perches for raptors, which could impact nesting prairie birds. Perches like fence posts and distribution line poles are already available, and any incremental effect from the proposed transmission line would be localized and negligible.



**Special Status Species:** The USFWS identified five listed species that could occur in the Project area: pallid sturgeon, interior least tern, whooping crane, black-footed ferret, and piping plover. The first three species are associated with river habitat and no suitable habitat is near the Project area. No prairie dog towns are found in the Project area; therefore, no suitable black-footed ferret habitat is present. LYREA's proposed Project would have no effect on these four species. No designated critical habitat for any of the five federally-listed species is located in the area of the proposed Project.

A small portion of the east end of the proposed Project is located within the 200-mile wide migration corridor for the whooping crane. Prairie pothole wetlands provide roosting and stopover sites for migrating whooping cranes, especially when co-located with foraging grounds, including agricultural fields. Suitable sites are present near the proposed Project. The principal risk the transmission line poses to the whooping crane is collision; a major cause of adult whooping crane mortality is collision with distribution lines, transmission lines, and even fences. Whooping cranes are especially vulnerable when flying short distances between roosting and foraging areas. Field evaluations by USFWS personnel have identified several areas where installing bird flight diverters on the proposed transmission line would reduce the risk of collision. LYREA has committed to installing and maintaining these devices. While collision risk cannot be completely eliminated, especially during times of poor visibility, compliance with the USFWS requirements reduces the risk to acceptable levels.

The MFWP did not identify any State species of concern within 3 miles of the proposed Project. The MFWP did request that surveys for native prairie, rock outcrop, and wetland habitats be conducted as these habitats are often associated with species of concern. MFWP also requested that sharptail grouse leks be considered. Sharptail grouse are protected by the State through regulated hunting seasons and license requirements, but the species has no Federal protection. Areas of native prairie degraded by grazing exist along the transmission line route and would be disturbed as discussed above. Most of the impact would be temporary, with very little permanent loss of native prairie. No rock outcrops would be impacted by the proposed Project, and wetlands (primarily associated with drainages) would be avoided by spanning. MFWP conducted a sharptail grouse lek survey in 2007, and no leks were found within one-quarter mile of the transmission line route or substation locations.

**Socioeconomics:** Construction of LYREA's proposed Project is expected to involve 16 workers over 12 months. Impacts are expected to be minor and positive over this short term. Land owners will see a one-time economic benefit from ROW easements and in-fee purchase of the small substation sites.

**Environmental Justice:** The proposed Project area is sparsely populated and 96.4 percent white, with poverty levels comparable with the rest of Richland County and Montana as a whole. The transmission line would be located at least 300 feet away from all residences. Minority and low-income populations would not be disproportionately impacted by LYREA's Project.

**Land Use:** The region is characterized by dispersed farmsteads, some now abandoned, with associated cultivated fields and pastures on rolling terrain typical of northeastern Montana. Conservation Reserve Program and State Institutional Trust Land tracts are found in the area. Wetlands, coulees, native prairie remnants, and woodlands/shelterbelts are scattered throughout the Project area, although they occupy a very small percentage of the land area. Within a quarter-mile of the Project, approximately 15 percent of land is considered prime farmland if irrigated, and a little less than 29 percent is classified as farmland of statewide importance. Oil wells and associated infrastructure have become common during the past 10 years. Transportation and access is provided by section line roads and trails. There are no land management or land use limitations that would conflict with the proposed Project.

Construction of the proposed Project would permanently remove a small amount of land, less than 2 acres, from agricultural production and would temporarily disturb an additional 11 acres. LYREA would compensate landowners for any crop damage caused by construction activities and would remediate any land surface impacts, such as compaction or rutting by chiseling or grading. Impacts such as structures affecting farming operations or aerial application of herbicides or fertilizer would be minimized by having the proposed Project facilities immediately adjacent to the highway ROW. No substantive impacts to land use are expected.

**Visual:** The existing visual environment is composed of agricultural fields, farmsteads, fallow fields, large open vistas, natural prairie areas, and oil facilities on a gently rolling topography with occasional ravines. Existing aboveground electrical infrastructure, such as transmission lines, distribution lines, and substations, are also scattered throughout the landscape. Farmsteads are visual focal points and are often located in lower areas and/or surrounded by planted tree windbreaks to avoid winds common to the area. LYREA currently delivers power to several existing oil wells and oil extraction facilities in the Project area and more energy development is planned. There are no Federal or State designated scenic byways in the area of the proposed Project or other unique or sensitive viewsheds. All Project components would contribute to visual impacts in the area but would be similar to other distribution and transmission facilities already present. Construction of the proposed Project would not introduce different or striking changes to the existing visual landscape. While the new transmission facilities would incrementally add to existing visual impacts, these additional visual impacts would not be significant.

**Noise:** Peak ambient noise levels in the Project area are typically in the 40 to 55 decibel range on the A-weighted scale or dBA. Wind noise and associated vegetation rustling is the largest component with contributions from farm equipment, road traffic, and birds. The nearest receptor to the proposed Project is over 300 feet away from the proposed Spring Lake Substation. That property is occasionally used as a shop area and is not continuously occupied. Construction noise would be temporary, and there are few receptors in the area. Operational noise would be quieter and would be below the background noise levels. Noise impacts are expected to be negligible.

**Health and Safety:** Health and safety issues include construction-related injury risks, electrocution hazards, stray voltages, electric and magnetic fields, and intentional destructive acts. Potential construction injuries would be minimized by the construction contractor complying with applicable Federal and State worker safety laws. Electrocution hazards would be minimized by

fencing and signage around the substations and compliance with utility industry standards for clearances and grounding. Severe weather could cause damage to the transmission line and allow conductors to reach the ground. Grounding would cause substation relays to trip, de-energizing the line and rendering it safe. Stray voltages, induced currents, and nuisance contact shocks are well understood and would be avoided by proper grounding of the transmission line and of large metallic objects near the transmission line, such as fences.

The possible effects of electric and magnetic fields have been debated by researchers for over 30 years and as yet no cause/effect relationship has been demonstrated. The issue is moot in this case as there are no residences within 300 feet of the transmission line or substations, and field levels would drop to background levels within that distance. Intentional destructive acts would likely be confined to random vandalism, such as shooting at insulators, or theft of metals from substations. The substations would be fenced, but there is little that can be done to completely protect the facilities from determined thieves and vandals. The effects of an outage on the line would be localized and would not result in major system disruptions. None of the health and safety issues would be of concern providing applicable laws and standard utility practices are followed.

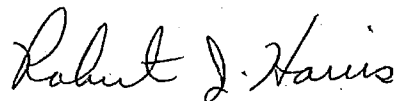
**Cultural Resources:** Records searches and a 100 percent pedestrian survey of the Project area identified three prehistoric sites and several historic homesteads, farmsteads, and a community meeting hall within the defined Area of Potential Effect (APE). Only one site, a rock cairn, has been evaluated for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, and it was determined to be ineligible. Western consulted with nine Native American tribes or communities having a historical affiliation with the general Project area in May 2008. No traditional cultural properties were identified by these consultations. Only one prehistoric site, a lithic scatter, is found within the ROW; the other sites are within the APE but lie outside of the ROW and would not be disturbed by LYREA's proposed Project. There is another transmission line in the area where the historic buildings are located. The site within the ROW would be spanned by the transmission line and would be avoided by construction and maintenance equipment. No significant direct, indirect, or cumulative impacts to cultural resources or traditional cultural properties are expected as a result of construction, maintenance, or operation of the Proposed Action.

**Cumulative Impacts:** Several future power generation and transmission projects in the region are identified in section 3.5.2 of the EA but all are some distance away from LYREA's proposed Project and would not contribute to cumulative impacts in the Project area. Oil and gas development of the Bakken field could, however, occur in proximity to the proposed Project, but exact locations and scope of these future developments are not known. This sort of information is generally confidential and proprietary, is still being defined, or is subject to further analysis. At the time the EA was circulated for comment, oil was over \$120.00 a barrel; as this FONSI is finalized, it has fallen to around \$40.00. Oil and gas development is closely tied to prices, and it is anticipated that low or fluctuating prices will result in comparatively less development. Wells require power for the pumps, so distribution feeds to well sites will be required as wells are developed. In general, the agricultural, low population character of the area will be slightly changed by the yet-to-be-determined level of oil and gas development. The changes are not expected to be significant in a cumulative sense.

**Summary:** The EA identified no direct, indirect, or cumulative significant impacts to the human environment that would result from the construction, operation, and maintenance of LYREA's proposed Fairview West to Spring Lake Transmission Project.

**DETERMINATION:** Based on the information contained in the EA, Western has determined that its action to approve the interconnection request and LYREA's proposed Project does not constitute a major Federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment within the meaning of NEPA. Therefore, considering the impact mitigation measures and BMP as described in the EA that are to be implemented over the course of the Project, preparation of an environmental impact statement is not required, and Western is issuing this FONSI.

Issued at Billings, Montana, on 3/6, 2009.



Robert J. Harris  
Regional Manager