

**National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
Finding of No Significant Impact
Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative (PSREC)
PSREC-PST Mid-Mile Fiber Project**

Summary

The Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative (PSREC) applied to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) for a grant to install a new middle mile network, consisting of approximately 183 miles of fiber optic cable. The new network will be a hybrid of aerial and buried fiber; 162 miles will be placed aerially on existing pole infrastructure and the remaining 21 miles will be installed in underground conduit. A small portion of the fiber will also be attached to bridges, as required, to cross water bodies and other sensitive features. PSREC also will install underground vaults; one Network Operating Center (NOC) in an existing building located at PSREC's offices in Portola, CA; one re-generation site to boost the fiber light signal, located at an existing maintenance facility at the intersection of SR70 and US 395; and two prefabricated 12'x20' secondary/ancillary nodes at existing PSREC substations. The new fiber network will provide broadband service to community anchor institutions (CAIs), including government facilities, county offices, community colleges, healthcare providers, a state correctional facility, and other CAIs. The network will connect three counties within California and one county in Nevada. The Project is also referred to as the PSREC-PST Mid-Mile Fiber Project (Project).

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) awarded this grant through BTOP, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The funding must be obligated and the Project completed within three years. This timeline will comply with the laws and regulations governing the use of this ARRA grant funding.

BTOP supports the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the United States and its Territories. As a condition of receiving BTOP grant funding, recipients must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Specifically, NEPA limits the types of actions that the grantee can initiate prior to completing required environmental reviews. Some actions may be categorically excluded from further NEPA analyses based on the specific types and scope of work to be conducted. For projects that are not categorically excluded from further environmental review, the grant recipient must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) that meets the requirements of NEPA. After a sufficiency review, NTIA may adopt the EA, use it as the basis for finding that the project will not have a significant impact on the environment, and issue a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Following such a finding, the BTOP grant recipient may then begin construction or other activities identified in the EA, in accordance with any special protocols or identified environmental protection measures.

PSREC completed an EA for this Project in October 2011. NTIA reviewed the EA, determined it is sufficient, and adopted it as part of the development of this FONSI.

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The Project includes:

- Installing a hybrid broadband network of aerial and buried fiber in existing utility and infrastructure rights-of-way (ROW) through Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra counties in California, and Washoe county in Nevada;
- Installing approximately 162 miles of fiber aerially by attaching to existing poles;
- Installing approximately 21 miles of fiber in underground conduit, including installing, via plowing, horizontal directional drilling (HDD), and trenching, approximately 8 miles of buried fiber in California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) ROW where aerial electrical distribution and telecommunication cable routes are not available;
- Installing underground vaults along the route at intervals of between 2,500 – 4,500 feet.
- Establishing one NOC in an existing building (the PSREC offices in Portola, CA); one re-generation site to boost the fiber light signal, consisting of a new building at the Caltrans maintenance facilities at the SR70 and US395 intersection; and two secondary/ancillary nodes, consisting of two 12 foot x 20 foot pre-fabricated modular units installed at existing PSREC substations.

Based on a review of the analysis in the EA, NTIA has determined that the Project, implemented in accordance with the preferred alternative, and incorporating best management practices (BMPs) and protective measures identified in the EA, will not result in any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI.

Additional information and copies of the Executive Summary of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the BTOP website (www2.ntia.doc.gov/) and the following contact:

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Purpose and Need

The purpose of this Project is to provide broadband internet access in rural areas of northeastern California and northwestern Nevada. These areas currently lack adequate access to the bandwidth required to support telecommuting, commerce, education, and medical technology

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needs. PSREC will facilitate more affordable and accessible broadband service for approximately 14,000 households, 2,100 businesses, and approximately 280 additional CAIs by enabling local internet service providers to utilize the Project's open access network. The new fiber will also create a broadband path to support regional Next Generation 911 and other public safety services, and enable telemedicine at regional correctional facilities.

Project Description

The Project involves installing 183 miles of middle mile fiber in Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra, Counties in California, and Washoe County in Nevada. PSREC will install approximately 162 miles of cable aerially on existing pole infrastructure and the remaining 21 miles in underground conduit. The buried fiber will include a segment to be installed in existing conduit along a five-mile portion of the route in the City of Reno, NV. The remaining 16 miles of underground fiber will be buried in new conduit installed along an eight mile span in the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) US395 ROW on the NV-CA border, which includes approximately 0.8-miles of new buried fiber on Susanville Rancheria Tribal land; approximately one mile in existing ROW on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administered lands in Nevada (if existing conduit is not utilized); and seven miles in existing city/county/state ROWs within existing developed areas in California. Aerial fiber will also be installed on existing infrastructure through a portion of the Plumas National Forest (PNF) along an existing ROW. PSREC has been granted ROW authorization from BLM and U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service (USDA-FS) for their ROW utility use. PSREC will obtain any required permits and complete any coordination associated with these ROWs, and meet any federal requirements of the land management agencies in constructing and maintaining the Project.

PSREC will bury new fiber using cable plowing, HDD, and trenching. Plowing is the preferred method of construction, where practicable and feasible. With any of these techniques, the maximum trench width will be 2 feet wide by 4 feet deep in existing ROWs and total ground disturbance will be approximately 5 acres. Within urban areas, fiber will be installed primarily by HDD. Conduit will be installed up to 12 feet under street intersections to avoid existing utilities. In non-urban areas, conduit will be installed using a plowing technique to open the soil to a depth of approximately 42-48 inches below the existing ground level. To facilitate future maintenance and access to the underground cable, 4'x4'x4' prefabricated concrete below-ground vaults will be installed every 2,500-4,500 feet. In areas where soil matrix prohibits plowing, a narrow trench will be excavated and the conduit placed at the bottom of the trench. The trench will then be backfilled and compacted. In areas of narrow accessibility and/or sensitive resources, the trench will be backfilled with slurry to ensure proper compaction and pavement integrity.

The proposed Project route crosses existing railroads in multiple locations. At these crossings, the cable will be buried a minimum of 18 feet below the railroad tracks under the base of the centerline of the tracks, or attached to existing overhead crossings for the electrical utility power lines. The buried fiber will be installed using HDD and will originate and terminate in existing

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ROW, outside of the railroad ROW. The route also crosses several major State Routes (70, 89, 36, and 139) as well as US395. The Project will cross the highways on existing aerial cable infrastructure or bridge attachments, or buried via HDD under the highway.

In areas where a buried portion of the Project route crosses a water resource, PSREC may accomplish the crossing by running the cable through conduit attached to bridges, in existing underground conduit, on existing aerial infrastructure, or using HDD. PSREC will consider the presence of existing infrastructure, the age and condition of the bridges, and preference of the jurisdictional agency before selecting the appropriate installation method. Existing conduit located in the bridge deck will be used where possible.

Aerial cable will be installed over approximately 148 miles of existing PSREC electrical pole structures and 14 miles of neighboring utility poles. Where the Project route crosses BLM lands, the utility poles will be accessed using existing adjacent roads and bucket trucks. Along the 11 miles of existing utility pole ROW, PSREC will install the cable using pulling and tensioning equipment. An estimated 0.25 acres of the existing ROW will be disturbed at these sites. Pulling and tensioning construction activities along the entire 162 miles of aerial fiber installation will result in approximately 3.7 acres of temporary ground disturbance. When a bucket truck is used to hang cable at other locations (i.e., approximately 2,470 poles), approximately 11 acres will be temporarily disturbed when setting the cable. HDD activities along US395 will temporarily disturb 960 square feet. The footprint of construction equipment used for trenching will disturb approximately 16.5 acres. In environmentally sensitive areas and within the PNF, trained workers will climb the poles to hang the cable; no trucks will be used. Total temporary ground disturbance within the existing ROWs, across all lands (from both trenching and aerial installation), will be approximately 52 acres.

One Network Operating Center (NOC), one re-generation site, and two secondary/ancillary nodes, are required along the route. These components would be located in existing buildings and at existing facilities, with the exception of the re-generation site which will require a new building. The secondary/ancillary nodes will consist of two 12 foot x 20 foot pre-fabricated modular units installed at existing PSREC substations (the PSREC Quincy #2 substation location on SR70 and the PSREC Leavitt substation on US395).

PSREC will establish approximately 15 construction staging and equipment lay-down areas every 18-20 miles along the 183 mile route. Wherever practical, the staging areas will be located in disturbed areas, at existing facilities, or on private property. Equipment lay down areas and equipment storage areas will be located as close to the construction areas as possible. Refueling of equipment and cleaning equipment will occur at PSREC's existing construction yards or existing facilities.

PSREC will directly connect to 18 CAIs in California; potential CAIs in Nevada will be identified in the future. At each CAI, PSREC will bring the fiber optic cable to the property line of the CAI. The CAI will be responsible for identifying and providing the access from the

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property line to their communications room, and providing the appropriate space and power for the fiber equipment that will reside in the facility.

Alternatives

The EA includes an analysis of the alternatives for implementing the Project to meet the purpose and need. NTIA also requires that an EA include a discussion of the no action alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the EA.

Hybrid (Aerial and Underground) Fiber Network Build (Preferred Alternative). This alternative will install approximately 183 miles of fiber cable. Approximately 162 miles of new fiber will be installed aerially on existing overhead electrical pole structures along existing federal and state/county/city ROWs and easements. The remaining 21 miles will be installed underground in conduit.

No Action Alternative. No action was also considered. This alternative represents conditions as they currently exist in the Project area. Under the no action alternative, the new network would not be constructed and the rural areas of Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra Counties in CA and Washoe County, NV would continue to be unserved or underserved by a broadband network. The EA examined this alternative as a baseline for evaluating impacts relative to other alternatives being considered.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward. PSREC considered installing the new infrastructure as an all-aerial network. However, in this option, the existing infrastructure could not support the additional network without replacing the poles, resulting in additional ground disturbance and increased time for permitting activities, and therefore was not carried forward for detailed analysis. The Project also considered an all underground network. This option was not carried forward for detailed analysis as PSREC determined that burying the cable would make the Project economically and environmentally infeasible. PSREC also considered an all wireless technology to complete the network. An all wireless technology would reduce the available bandwidths and speeds across the network and not optimize the availability of existing electrical infrastructure.

Findings and Conclusions

The EA analyzed existing conditions and environmental consequences of the preferred alternative and the no action alternative in 11 major resource areas, including Noise, Air Quality, Geology and Soils, Water Resources, Biological Resources, Historic and Cultural Resources, Aesthetic and Visual Resources, Land Use, Infrastructure, Socioeconomic Resources, and Human Health and Safety. Cumulative impacts were also evaluated.

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Noise

This Project will have short-term impacts on noise due to the use of heavy machinery, such as plows or excavators. However, this noise will be restricted to the construction phase of the Project. There are few sensitive noise receptors along the proposed route until reaching the northern boundary of the City of Reno. In urban areas, where installation and construction equipment may be more disruptive, PSREC will restrict construction activities to daylight hours (7am to 7pm) and will notify area residents located within 500 feet of the planned construction five days in advance. The operation and maintenance of the fiber line would be limited to occasional maintenance activities, generally supported by pick-up trucks, or in the event of an emergency. Noise levels from such activities would be low and would not exceed the Counties' noise standards. Based on these assessments, no significant noise impacts are expected to occur as a result of this Project.

Air Quality

Operation of heavy equipment and vehicles for plowing, HDD, and trenching construction will result in emissions of air pollutants and fugitive dust. However, these air pollutant emissions will be limited to the construction period and are considered negligible in comparison to emissions currently experienced along roadway corridors adjacent to the Project ROWs. The Project will also result in short-term, minor increases in the use of fossil fuel and associated greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions during construction. However, considering the nature and scope of the installation, PSREC estimates that Project-related GHG emissions (up to 1,681 metric tons of CO₂) will be well below the Council on Environmental Quality's presumptive effects threshold of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from an action. Furthermore, no air district thresholds would be exceeded. Long-term operation of the network for data transmission will not result in ongoing air emissions. Based on these assessments, no significant impacts on air quality are expected.

Geology and Soils

Fiber optic infrastructure will be installed in existing ROWs, resulting in temporary disturbance of approximately 52 acres. Of that, aerial construction activities account for 13.9 acres, and 3.4 acres for construction yards (material laydown, storage, and parking). Soils in these areas are predominately previously disturbed road base and fill. Plowing, trenching, HDD, and aerial installation activities along small portions of the route may damage vegetation and surface gravel that anchor underlying native soils. Temporary erosion and sediment control devices, including sediment barriers, will be installed promptly after soil disturbance and in accordance with NPDES requirements. Attachment of fiber to existing bridges will have no impact on soil or geology. The placement of two secondary/ancillary nodes, underground vaults, and anchors will permanently disturb approximately 0.034 acres. PSREC will implement best management practices, such as revegetation, reseeding, redistribution of topsoil, straw mats, and erosion/sediment control measures. Based on these assessments, no significant impact on geology and soils is expected to occur as a result of this Project.

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Water Resources

The Project crosses many wetlands, rivers, streams, ephemeral creeks, and riparian zones. All rivers and wetlands will be avoided by either hanging new fiber on existing utility poles, attaching it to existing bridges, or blowing it into existing conduit. The Middle Fork Feather River is a designated Wild and Scenic River, crossed by the Project several times. To cross this resource, PSREC will hang the fiber on existing poles. Some of the ephemeral creeks will be avoided by using HDD to install the cable. This approach is consistent with the standards of Caltrans (2008) and the Nevada Department of Transportation. The Project will temporarily impact the bed of some ephemeral creeks between Hallelujah Junction and Reno due to trenching. The trenching will be conducted in accordance with the conditions of the Nationwide Permit 12 and will occur during the dry season. The bed will be returned to pre-construction grade. Appropriate BMPs will be used to ensure Project activities do not significantly impact water resources. These BMPs may include restoring any damaged water resources to pre-disturbed condition; conducting all construction activities to minimize disturbance to vegetation, drainage channels, and intermittent and perennial stream banks; and using sediment barriers to protect surface water quality. Although several floodplains exist in the Project area, there will be no new encroachments into these resources, as no construction, soil fill, or alternation of the floodplain topography will occur. Therefore, the Project does not require a floodplain risk assessment. Along the majority of the Project route, the new cable will span designated floodplains on existing power poles. No impacts from construction, operation, or maintenance of installation equipment are anticipated. Based on these determinations, the Project will have no significant adverse impacts on water resources.

Biological Resources

There are three federally listed threatened and endangered species with potential habitat in the Project area: Cui-ui (*Chasmistes cujus*), Lahontan Cutthroat Trout (*Oncohynchus clarkia henshawi*) and Carson Wandering Skipper (CWS; *Pseudocopaeodes eunus obscurus*). The Cui-ui and Lahontan Cutthroat Trout are known to occur in the Truckee River, downstream from the Project. The Project will cross the Truckee River in existing conduit on a bridge and therefore will have no effect on the Cui-ui or Lahontan Cutthroat Trout. In addition, as documented in the Biological and Aquatic Habitat Assessment provided by PSREC, there are no suitable areas of saltgrass habitat for CWS in the Project area, there are no known records of the species occurring in the Project area, and the Project will have no known effect on any known occurrence of CWS outside the Project area. Critical habitat has not been designated for any of these three species within the Project area. Additionally, PSREC determined that the Project will have no effect on federal candidate species that occur in the region, or historically occurred in the region, including the Sierra Nevada yellow-legged frog, the greater sage grouse, the Pacific fisher, the wolverine, and Webber's ivesia. The Project also will have no effect on the eight California-listed or candidate threatened or endangered species known to occur in the region, with implementation of all mitigation measures outlined in the EA. Lastly, the Project area provides marginal or suitable habitat for 152 other special-status species (38 animals and 114 plant species) as designated by the USDA-FS, BLM, and various state agencies. Implementation of the avoidance measures outlined in the EA will avoid impacts on these species. PSREC sent a letter to the U.S. Fish and

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Wildlife Service (USFWS) Reno and USFWS Sacramento offices on February 11, 2011 requesting written concurrence of a 'No Effects' determination for the Project. In a letter dated March 8, 2011, the USFWS Reno office concurred that the Project is not likely to adversely impact CWS. In an email dated March 30, 2011, the USFWS Sacramento office concurred with the USFWS Reno office determination. Based on these determinations, the Project will have no significant adverse impacts on biological resources.

Historic and Cultural Resources

NTIA initiated formal consultation with the California Department of Parks and Recreation, California State Historic Preservation Office (CA SHPO) on October 13, 2010 the Nevada State Historic Preservations Officer (NV SHPO) on October 19, 2010, and the Susanville Indian Rancheria (SIR) Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) on October 27, 2010. PSREC engaged the professional services of Western Cultural Resource Management, Inc. (WCRM) to prepare a cultural resources report for segments of the Project in both states. During October and November 2010, WCRM conducted a file and literature search of the proposed route, extending one mile on both sides of the route line, to identify previous surveys and recorded cultural resources. Through the file and literature search, WCRM identified 262 cultural resources that were previously recorded within 50 meters on either side of the proposed center line (141 in California and 121 in Nevada). After completing the report, WCRM provided findings and recommendations to PSREC including a recommendation that the Project will have no adverse effect on historical resources.

Between April 13 and May 5, 2011, WCRM conducted a Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of nine miles in Washoe County, NV and Sierra and Lassen Counties, CA. The Class III inventory and findings are documented in a June 14, 2011 report titled *A Class III Cultural Resources Inventory of Approximately Nine Miles of Fiber Optic Right-of-Way for Plumas Sierra Rural Electrical Cooperative's Mid-Mile Fiber Project, Washoe County, Nevada and Sierra and Lassen Counties, California* (Steven Mehls et al., WCRM: June 2011). The Class III report included only the Project area where surface disturbance will occur, as identified by the area of potential effect (APE). The Class III inventory and report documented six previously unrecorded archaeological sites and 11 isolated finds. In a June 15, 2011 letter to Jill Dowling, Federal Preservation Officer, U.S. Department of Commerce, PSREC confirmed that a cultural resources report was conducted and they understood the findings and are committed to implementing recommendations required to avoid adverse effects on historic properties. Based on the Class III report recommendations, PSREC drafted an *Unanticipated Discovery and Monitoring Plan* (Steven Mehls et al., WCRM: June 24, 2011) for the evaluation and treatment of previously unknown or unexpected discoveries of cultural resources that may be encountered during construction of the Project. The Class III report and Unanticipated Discovery and Monitoring Plan were sent to the CA and NV SHPOs on July 1, 2011. NTIA requested concurrence on a finding of no adverse effect on historic properties, based on implementation of avoidance measures and archaeological monitoring requirements, and exclusive of the route segments under the jurisdiction of the SIR THPO, for which tribal consultation was initiated by NTIA (see below).

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On August 11, 2011, the NV SHPO concurred with the finding of No Adverse Effect for the portion of the Project under the state's jurisdiction. On July 19, 2011, the CA SHPO requested clarification and additional information about the Project, specifically for sites CA-LAS-2232H and CA-SIE-719/H and the additional seven miles of fiber planned in existing state, county, and local ROWs. In an August 1, 2011 email, NTIA responded to the CA SHPO request for additional clarifying information on these two sites and the seven-mile span of fiber. Via teleconference on August 10, 2011, NTIA addressed the urgent need for CA SHPO response.

On August 15, 2011, the CA SHPO requested additional information from NTIA regarding specific ground disturbing activities and requested subsurface testing for site CA-SIE-719/H. On August 17, 2011 NTIA provided the CA SHPO with details on outstanding issues regarding ground disturbing activities and confirmed that based on the recommendations outlined in the Class III report for site CA-SIE-719/H and the commitment to an onsite archaeological monitor, the associated construction will have No Adverse Effect on Historic Properties and no further testing is warranted. On August 22, 2011, CA SHPO further requested additional mapping for the route through Susanville and Quincy, and clarification for the fiber segment along Highway 139 in Susanville and along Highway 70 between Quincy and East Quincy. NTIA responded to this CA SHPO request via a letter dated August 26, 2011.

On September 9, 2011, the CA SHPO concurred with NTIA's determination of no adverse effect provided that PSREC:

- Implements report recommendations to avoid site CA-SIE-719H (trench slowly in the vicinity with an archaeological monitor present);
- Reroutes the trench outside the boundaries of the historic Evans Ranch Complex (P-47-720) to avoid adverse effects to the site;
- Has a qualified archaeologist install orange ESA fencing around historic properties within the APE that are to be avoided or bored under, including the segments of Old US Highway 395 (CA-LAS-2232H) (recommended);
- Locates a receiving pit between segments 6 and 7 of Old US Highway 397 as far as possible from the boundaries of both segments (recommended, not required); and
- Conducts boring four feet or deeper to provide a larger buffer between the historic road matrix and the conduit route (suggested, not recommended).

On September 29, 2011, the SIR THPO responded to NTIA-initiated consultations regarding segments and connections on tribal land not under SHPO jurisdiction. In the September 29 letter, the SIR THPO concurred "that no historic properties shall be affected by the aerial fiber connections to the SIR tribe proposed by the BTOP grant #5684."

On March 8, 2010 the Native American Heritage Commission (NAHC) provided PSREC with a list of nine California Native American tribes, which PSREC would be required to consult with under California regulations. In order to comply with these regulations, on March 15, 2010,

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PSREC sent a scoping letter to each of the nine Native American Tribal representatives identified by the NAHC. On April 8, 2010, the Enterprise Rancheria Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe responded providing Project implementation stipulations and with an offer to provide site monitors for the Project. No other tribes responded to the initial letters sent by PSREC.

On October 21, 2010, the NAHC provided PSREC with a list of an additional 14 California Native America tribes, which PSREC would be required to consult with under California regulations. On October 22, 2010, NTIA notified 11 additional Native American Tribal representatives of the Project through the Federal Communication Commission's Tower Constriction Notification System (TCNS). On October 27, 2010, PSREC provided an additional letter about the Project to each of the 34 tribes that had been identified by NAHC (in March and October 2010) and NTIA through TCNS.

On November 10, 2010, the Enterprise Rancheria Estom Yumeka Maidu Tribe responded with a letter requesting that NTIA contact the Greenville and Susanville Rancherias Tribes about the Project. Also, the Honey Lake Maidu followed up with a phone message requesting updates to the October 2010 notice letter of intent. The tribe was concerned about new ground/soil disturbance due to construction along the 8 miles of new cable to be installed along US395. PSREC and NTIA followed up with the Honey Lake Maidu, Greenville and Susanville Rancherias, per their requests and after consultation, the tribes only concern was underground installation of fiber, for which they are requiring tribal monitoring.

On November 17, 2010, PSREC spoke with the Pit River Tribe regarding the Project. PSREC sent mapping data to the tribe and indicated that the Susanville installation of buried fiber would be conducted in existing urban landscape (streets and roads) and there would be no new disturbance. PSREC forwarded the Class I Literature Search study on February 1, 2011. On February 4, 2011, NTIA issued a subsequent TCNS notification updating the Project area to include Sparks, Nevada, in Washoe County, which included an additional 8 tribal representatives that were not previously identified by NAHC or TCNS. The correspondence included a detailed Project description, a Project route map, and request for the identification of interest or concern regarding the Project. No additional responses have been received to date.

During September 2011, NTIA met with the RSIC and SIR THPOs in person to discuss the Project, and address any cultural resource concerns. NTIA agreed to require that PSREC have the Reno Sparks Indian Colony provide a qualified tribal archaeological monitor for new buried fiber portions of the Project. PSREC must contract with a qualified Tribal Monitor from the Reno Sparks Indian Colony THPO for the 8 miles of underground installation along Caltrans US395 ROW. The Reno Sparks Indian Colony and the Carson City BLM will also provide comments on the Unanticipated Discovery and Monitoring Plan (Plan), included as Appendix F to the EA, which PSREC must implement during construction. On September 14, 2011, the Greenville Rancheria sent a letter supporting the SIR and Reno Sparks Indian Colony's (RSIC) collaborative request to utilize a Native American Monitor for the fiber Project.

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In the event of any Project changes increasing the amount and/or area of ground disturbance, PSREC will seek approval and coordinate with NTIA and the relevant SHPOs and THPOs.

Based on the consultations outlined above, the Project will not significantly affect cultural or historic resources in the region.

Aesthetic and Visual Resources

Project implementation will result in short-term visual impacts during construction. These impacts are associated with the presence of construction equipment, storage of equipment and materials, and removal of vegetation. Because construction vehicle traffic and Project activity will move along the fiber route, the viewshed from the Project site will not be permanently affected. The cable will either be hung on existing utility lines in the area, or be buried underground, with no long-term visible effect. In areas of scenic visibility, such as on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or USDA-FS lands, the cable will be installed on existing utility lines that, in many cases, are shielded from view by dense forest. The Project site is not designated as wilderness land, nor is it adjacent to any wilderness areas in the reservation. Based on these assessments, this Project will not significantly affect aesthetic or visual qualities in the region.

Land Use

The Project does not conflict with the current land uses in the Project area. No short term impacts to land use will occur as construction will move rapidly and not impede other local or regional Projects' construction or development. All overhead cable will be attached to existing power lines or placed underground within existing state/county/city street ROWs. Minimal ground disturbance is anticipated from either overhead or underground cable installation. The 12 foot x 20 foot re-generation facility to be established on the NV-CA border is the only new facility associated with this Project. This prefabricated building will be placed on an existing disturbed (vacant) property owned by Caltrans. The site is zoned commercial by Lassen County.

The Nevada BLM provided PSREC a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI), dated July 2011. PSREC submitted the SFFO ROW application (SF-299) for the construction of fiber optic broadband lines across public lands administered by BLM in Washoe County, NV and Lassen County, CA. BLM deemed that the Project is in conformance with the Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan (2001). BLM concluded that the Project will have no significant impact.

The California BLM provided PSREC a FONSI, dated September 20, 2011. BLM issued a ROW permit to PSREC for authorization of aerial placement of fiber optic cables, upon existing transmission poles, constructed and maintained by PSREC. Overall, BLM concluded that the Project is in conformance with the Eagle Lake Resource Management Plan and Record of Decision (2008) and determined that the Project will have no significant impact.

In September 2011, PNF issued a memo to PSREC that served as a temporary construction permit to access, install, maintain, and operate a fiber optic line in the PNF on existing poles in a

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designated corridor. In this corridor, PSREC will attach fiber to approximately 13 miles of existing overhead pole structures in the existing power line ROW. PSREC is not planning to establish any additional facilities, including staging areas, on PNF-administered lands.

Based on these findings, no significant adverse impacts on land use are expected to result from Project implementation.

Infrastructure

The Project will enhance telecommunications infrastructure by adding 183 miles of broadband fiber optic cable and connecting 18 CAIs to the new network. The Project's fiber route will be primarily hung on overhead utility lines, in existing ROWs. Various levels of infrastructure services (e.g., roadways, telephone lines, natural gas, and electric lines) are in place throughout the Project area. To avoid damage to existing infrastructure, PSREC will verify utility locations through adequate testing measures to determine the location of existing water, sewer, storm drainage, electrical power, natural gas, and telecommunication lines. There will be minor, short term construction impacts on roadways and traffic flow during fiber installation. PSREC will implement traffic control measures that will follow an approved traffic plan. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on infrastructure, and is not anticipated to result in significant adverse impacts on infrastructure.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Project will enhance broadband access among underserved users in Lassen, Plumas, and Sierra Counties in California, and Washoe County, Nevada. This improved broadband access will result in socioeconomic benefits such as economic development and improved public safety, tourism, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. No residents, minority, or low-income populations or businesses will be displaced as a result of Project implementation. Rather, these populations are expected to benefit from enhanced broadband access in the area. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on socioeconomics in the planned service area, and will not result in significant impacts on socioeconomic resources. Additionally, no cumulative impacts to area tourism are expected.

Human Health and Safety

The Project is not expected to have any adverse impacts on human health and safety during normal operation, but may have minimal, short-term impacts during construction. The Project area is not on a federally or state-listed contamination site, thus no impacts from exposure to hazardous materials would be anticipated. PSREC has a Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure (SPCC) plan in place at all of its existing facilities where re-fueling or maintenance activities will take place. PSREC will ensure that all construction sites maintain sanitary conditions at all times and waste materials will be properly disposed. Based on these considerations and additional BMP's listed, significant adverse impacts on human health and safety are not expected. Conversely, improved telecommunications infrastructure may actually improve human health through telemedicine, and public safety through better emergency management communications.

**National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
Finding of No Significant Impact
Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative (PSREC)
PSREC-PST Mid-Mile Fiber Project**

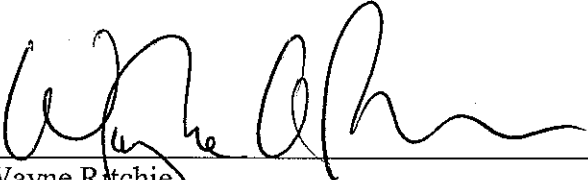
Cumulative Impacts

PSREC did not identify any significant cumulative impacts that will result from Project implementation. With Project construction occurring along existing ROWs, there is potential for overlap between the planned installation and future improvements. PSREC will work with other utilities, and federal, state, and local governments, to coordinate scheduling to avoid construction conflicts, including traffic safety and access issues. As such, no cumulative impacts on the environment are anticipated.

Decision

Based on the above analysis, NTIA concludes that constructing and operating the Project as defined by the preferred alternative, identified BMPs, and protective measures, will not require additional mitigation. A separate mitigation plan is not required for the Project. The analyses indicate that the proposed action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NTIA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Issued:



Wayne Ritchie
Chief Administrative Officer
Office of Telecommunications and Information Applications
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Date 11/07/2011

