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SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Background

Executive Order (E.O.) 10485, as amended by E.O. 12038, requires that a Presidential permit be issued by DOE before electric transmission facilities may be constructed, maintained, operated, or connected at the U.S. international border. The E.O. provides that a Presidential permit may be issued after a finding that the proposed project is consistent with the public interest. In determining consistency with the public interest, DOE considers the impacts of the project on the reliability of the U.S. electric power system and on the environment. The regulations implementing the E.O. have been codified at 10 CFR 205.320-205.329. Issuance of the permit indicates that there is no Federal objection to the project, but does not mandate that the project be completed.

On August 17, 2000, TEP, a regulated public utility, filed an application for a Presidential permit with the Office of Fossil Energy of DOE and, on May 18, 2001, supplemented its application with its March 1, 2001 application to the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC) for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility. TEP proposes to construct two 345,000-volt (345-kV) transmission circuits on a single set of support structures across the U.S. international border in the vicinity of Nogales, Arizona. Both circuits would originate at TEP's existing South Substation located approximately 15 miles south of Tucson in the vicinity of Sahuarita, Arizona, and 1.4 miles east of Interstate Highway 19 (I-19), south of Pima Mine Road, in Pima County, Arizona. Near the U.S. international border, the proposed transmission lines would interconnect with the Citizens Communications system at the proposed Gateway Substation that would be constructed just west of Nogales, Arizona. South of the border, TEP would extend the line approximately 60 miles to the Santa Ana Substation, located in the City of Santa Ana, Sonora, Mexico, and owned by the Comisión Federal de Electricidad (CFE), the national electric utility of Mexico.

On July 10, 2001, DOE published in the **Federal Register** (66 FR 35950) a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an EIS for the proposed project. The NOI informed the public of the proposed scope of the EIS, solicited public participation in the scoping process, and announced public scoping meetings

that were held on July 30, 2001, in Sahuarita, Arizona, and on July 31, 2001, in Rio Rico, Arizona. The public scoping period initially closed on August 9, 2001, but then was extended to August 31, 2001 (**Federal Register** Notice of July 27, 2001, 66 FR 39154). Comments received during the public scoping process were used in preparing the Draft EIS.

Action Alternatives Considered

The action alternatives developed for the proposed project focus on alternative routes to interconnect TEP's South Substation with the proposed Gateway Substation. TEP's evaluation of interconnection schemes, scoping comments, and discussions with DOE resulted in three potentially viable alternative corridors for transmission interconnection in southern Arizona: the Western Corridor (the applicant's Preferred Alternative), the Central Corridor, and the Crossover Corridor. The Crossover Corridor was included for analysis in this Draft EIS based on public and tribal input received during the public scoping period and tribal consultations. Another alternative, the Eastern Corridor, was originally proposed by TEP but was eliminated from analysis as a reasonable alternative in this Draft EIS at TEP's request for reasons of reliability, constructability, existing encroachment into the right-of-way, and visual impacts.

NEPA requires the identification of the agency's preferred alternative or alternatives in a Draft EIS if one or more exists or, if one does not yet exist at the draft stage, in the Final EIS, 40 CFR part 1502.14(e). DOE reported in the NOI (see above) that TEP's Preferred Alternative is the Western Corridor. In light of TEP's preference and the ACC's decision to site TEP's proposed line only along the Western Corridor, DOE has designated the Western Corridor as DOE's preferred alternative at this time. DOE welcomes comments on this designation. The cooperating agencies have not designated their respective preferred alternatives at this time but will do so after their review of environmental information is completed. Identification of a preferred alternative in the Draft EIS does not preclude selection of a different or modified preferred alternative in the Final EIS. The final selection of preferred alternatives will be based on a balanced evaluation of the environmental consequences, public comment, and consideration of national policies.

No Action Alternative

The Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) regulations require that an agency "include the alternative of no action" as one of the alternatives it considers, 40 CFR 1502.14(d). For DOE and the cooperating agencies, "no action" means any one of the Federal agencies declining to grant approval for their area of jurisdiction. Each agency will make its own decision independently, so that it is possible that one or more agencies could grant permission for the proposal while another could deny permission.

The Draft EIS analyzes the potential environmental effects, or impacts, of TEP constructing and operating the proposed project in one of the three alternative transmission corridors, and also analyzes the No Action Alternative. CEQ's regulations require that an EIS contain a description of the environmental effects (both positive and negative) of the proposed alternatives. The regulations also distinguish between direct and indirect effects (40 CFR 1508.8). Direct effects are caused by an action and occur at the same time and place as the action. Indirect effects are reasonably foreseeable effects caused by the action that occur later in time or farther in distance. Both direct and indirect effects are addressed in the Draft EIS. CEQ's regulations also require that an EIS contain a description of the cumulative impacts of the proposed alternatives (40 CFR 1508.7). CEQ's regulations define cumulative impacts as those that result from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions. Cumulative impacts are addressed in the Draft EIS.

The Draft EIS presents information on the potential environmental effects of both the proposed transmission line construction and subsequent operation on land use and recreation, visual resources, biological resources, cultural resources, socioeconomic, geology and soils, water resources, air quality, noise, human health and environment, infrastructure, transportation, and minority and low income populations. The Draft EIS also includes a Floodplains and Wetlands Assessment, in accordance with E.O. 11988, *Floodplain Management*, and E.O. 11990, *Protection of Wetlands*.

Coronado National Forest Plan Amendment

The Coronado National Forest, U.S. Forest Service, has identified the need for amendments to its Land and