

# Notices

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This section of the FEDERAL REGISTER contains documents other than rules or proposed rules that are applicable to the public. Notices of hearings and investigations, committee meetings, agency decisions and rulings, delegations of authority, filing of petitions and applications and agency statements of organization and functions are examples of documents appearing in this section.

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

### Forest Service

#### Methow Transmission Project, Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests, Okanogan County, WA

**AGENCY:** Forest Service, USDA.

**ACTION:** Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

**SUMMARY:** Notice is hereby given that the USDA Forest Service and the Okanogan Public Utility District No. 1 (PUD) will jointly prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that will evaluate alternatives to provide reliable electric power to the Methow Valley and improve electric distribution to customers in the lower Methow Valley. The project is located in Okanogan County, Washington. Although the proposed action does not involve Federal lands, two of the preliminary alternatives identified for this project involve a "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup electric transmission line. A "hot" rebuild would involve replacing the existing high-voltage transmission line and its poles while maintaining power in the existing lines. Approximately 4.5 miles of the 27 mile Loup-Loup transmission line is located on the Okanogan National Forest, approximately 12 miles west of the town of Okanogan. The proposed "hot" rebuild alternatives would require additional clearing of vegetation in the existing right-of-way (ROW) on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The proposed project will comply with direction in the 1989 Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), as amended. The Forest Plan provides the overall guidance for management of NFS lands included in this proposal. In addition, the Loup-Loup line also traverses approximately one mile of Bureau of Land Management lands. The agencies invite written comments on the

scope of this project. In addition, the agencies give notice of this analysis so that interested and affected individuals are aware of how they may participate and contribute to the final decision.

**DATES:** Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received by December 15, 2003. A public information and scoping meeting is proposed to be held in November to provide information about the project to the public and to allow people to comment on the project.

**ADDRESSES:** Submit written comments and suggestions concerning the scope of the analysis to Keith Rowland, Project Coordinator, Okanogan Valley Office, 1240 Second Avenue South, Okanogan, Washington 98840 [Phone: (509) 826-3067; E-mail: [krowland@fs.fed.us](mailto:krowland@fs.fed.us)].

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Direct questions about the proposed action and EIS to Keith Rowland, Project Coordinator, Okanogan Valley Office, 1240 Second Avenue South, Okanogan, Washington 98840 [Phone: (509) 826-3067; E-mail: [krowland@fs.fed.us](mailto:krowland@fs.fed.us)].

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

*Purpose and Need for Action:* The Okanogan Public Utility District (PUD) is a non-profit local government entity whose mission is to provide reliable electrical service to those within its defined boundaries, and to plan for the future electrical service needs of its constituency (Title 54 RCW). The PUD is responsible for providing electrical service to the communities of Pateros, Twisp, and the unincorporated area of the lower Methow Valley in Okanogan County, among other communities in its service area. The Okanogan National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan permits and gives priority to special uses that provide public service. Pateros, Twisp, and the unincorporated lower Methow Valley area are currently served by a single transmission route constructed in 1948 that crosses Loup Loup Pass from Okanogan to Twisp. Distribution of that electrical service throughout the lower Methow Valley depends on a system that is approaching capacity now under average winter conditions and will not meet severe winter demand. The PUD has proposed the construction of a new transmission line, a new substation, and improvements to the distribution system in order to meet its obligations under

the law to provide reliable electricity at reasonable rates to its ratepayers.

The PUD is also a party to a general transfer agreement (GTA) with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) for providing transmission service to the Okanogan County Electric Cooperative (Co-op). The Co-op provides service to the upper Methow Valley including the towns of Winthrop and Mazama. BPA has notified the PUD that the reliability of the existing transmission system is below standard.

*Proposed Action:* The proposed action, the project proposed by the PUD, involves construction of approximately 26.5 miles of 115 KV electric transmission line and associated access roads between Twisp and Pateros in Okanogan County, Washington. The first 5.5 miles of transmission line (from the existing Twisp substation) would overbuild existing distribution along highways 20 and 1523. Existing poles would be replaced as part of this overbuild. The remainder of the proposed transmission line would be constructed along the benches and foothills to the east of Highway 153. The final 1.7 miles of the proposed transmission line (south to the existing Pateros substation) would parallel Watson Draw Road. The proposed project would also include construction of a new substation located along Highway 153 between Carlton and Methow in the Gold Creek area, as well as improvements to the existing distribution system. Construction of the proposed project would occur in 2006. Under NEPA, the "proposed action" may be, but is not necessarily, the agency's "preferred alternative." The proposed action identified above represents the PUD's initial proposal that has not yet undergone analysis in the EIS process. The EIS process will involve evaluation of the proposed action described above, as well as other reasonable alternatives to the proposed action.

*Alternatives:* For the purposes of this analysis, the PUD and Forest Service have identified preliminary action alternatives for consideration in the scoping process. The preliminary action alternatives all include construction of new electric transmission capacity and improvement of the existing distribution capacity. Four of the preliminary action alternatives also include construction of a new substation in the Gold Creek area