

near Washington State Route 153. Two of the preliminary alternatives involve a "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup electric transmission line.

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 and approximately one mile is located on Bureau of Land Management Land, two miles southwest of Okanogan. The proposed "hot" rebuild alternatives would require additional clearing of vegetation in the existing ROW on National Forest Service (NFS) lands.

The alternatives currently under consideration are:

- The No-action alternative under which there would be no new powerline built and non "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup line.

- The proposed Twisp/Pateros transmission line that would connect existing substations in Twisp and Pateros and involve construction of a new substation located along Highway 153 between Carlton and Methow in the Gold Creek area, as well as distribution improvements.

- A "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line that would include approximately 15 miles of new transmission line from Pateros to Gold Creek, as well as a new substation in the Gold Creek area. This new transmission line and substation are assumed to involve the same alignment and substation proposed for the Twisp/Pateros transmission line and substation.

- A "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line that would include an upgrade of distribution between Twisp and Pateros, but not a substation or the 15 miles of new line to Gold Creek.

- A new transmission line that would overbuild or follow the existing distribution line near the Methow River along the valley floor, including a new substation.

- A new transmission line along the valley floor that would be aligned to reduce the number of Methow River crossings associated with a route that overbuilds or follows the existing distribution line. This alternative would also include construction of a new substation.

The final alternatives analyzed in detail will depend on issues raised during public scoping.

Lead and Cooperating Agencies: The Forest Service and the PUD will be joint lead agencies in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.5(b), and are responsible for preparation of the EIS. The Forest

Service will serve as the lead NEPA agency. The PUD will serve as the lead Washington SEPA agency. The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) will be cooperating agencies are needed.

Nature of Decision To Be Made: The Forest Supervisor for the Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests will decide whether to permit a "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup electric transmission line across NFS lands if this is the preferred alternative identified by the agencies. If this alternative is permitted, the Forest Supervisor will also decide what mitigation measures and monitoring will be required. The Forest Supervisor will only be making a decision regarding operations on NFS lands. The Forest Supervisor will not have a decision to make if the PUD selects an alternative for the Methow Transmission Project that does not involve NFS lands.

Scoping Process: Public participation will be especially important at several points during the analysis. The participating agencies will be seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, local agencies, Native American Tribes and other individuals and organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed project. This input will be used in preparation of the draft EIS. The scoping process includes:

- Identifying major issues to be analyzed in depth.
- Identifying issues that have been addressed by a relevant previous environmental analysis including the *SEPA Checklist and Determination of Nonsignificance and Response to Comments and Additional Information on the SEPA Checklist and DNS* documents prepared by the PUD.
- Identifying potential environmental effects of the alternatives identified to date.

- Identifying potential alternatives that meet the Purpose and Need of the project.

- Notifying interested members of the public of opportunities to participate through meetings, personal contacts, or written comment. Keeping the public informed through the media and/or written material (e.g., newsletters, correspondence, etc.)

Preliminary Issues

A number of issues were identified in the public comment received on the *SEPA Checklist and Determination of Nonsignificance* issued by the PUD in

August 1998. Major issues identified included potential effects to eagles and sharp-tailed grouse, critical deer habitat, noxious weeds, aesthetic concerns, and cumulative effects. These issues were identified specifically with regards to the proposed Twisp/Pateros transmission line route. The Forest Service has identified the following preliminary issues should a "hot" rebuild of the existing Loup-Loup transmission line be identified by the agencies as the preferred alternative: impacts on visual quality, potential for spread of noxious weeds, potential for sedimentation, and safety during construction.

Comment Requested

This notice of intent initiates the scoping process, which guides development of the EIS. The Forest Service is seeking public and agency comment on the proposed action to identify major issues to be analyzed in depth and assistance in identifying potential alternatives to be evaluated. Comments received to this notice, including the names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action, and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality. Where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted, without name and address, within a specified number of days.

A draft EIS will be prepared for comment. Copies will be distributed to interested and affected agencies, organizations, and members of the public for their review and comment. The comment period on the draft EIS will be 45 days from the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes the notice of availability in the **Federal Register**. The draft EIS is