United States Department of the Interior
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Washington D. C. 20240
125 South 600 West
Price, UT 84501
http://www/blm/gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:
WO-350

State of Montana
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
P.O. Box 200901
Helena, MT 59620-0901
http://www/deq.mt.gov

IN REPLY REFER TO:
Mountain States Transmission Intertie

August 8, 2008

Dear Interested Party:

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ), and USDA Forest Service (USFS) give notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to address potential effects of a proposed project by NorthWestern Energy to build and operate a new 500kV electric transmission line requiring a special use permit, right-of-way grant, and/or temporary use permit for construction, operation, and maintenance of a 500kV electric transmission line and associated substation, including new access roads. The transmission line is known as the Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI) Project.

NorthWestern Energy's three project alternatives range from 390 to 430 miles in length, but additional alternatives or variations on alternatives may be developed through the environmental review process. Alternatives for the proposed transmission line would pass over private, state, and federally managed lands in Montana and Idaho. Federally managed lands include lands administered by the BLM, USFS, USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) U.S. Sheep Experiment Station, and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Idaho National Laboratory. Authorization of this proposal may result in the amendment of USFS and BLM land use plans (Forest Plans, Management Framework Plans, and Resource Management Plans). The Draft EIS is scheduled for release in late spring 2009, and the Final EIS is scheduled for completion in late fall 2009.The applicant desires to place the line into service in 2013. The proposed alternatives for the MSTI project are shown on the enclosed map.

Agency Jurisdiction, Roles and Responsibilities

For lands in Montana, NorthWestern Energy has submitted an application to MDEQ for a Certificate of Compliance under the Montana Major Facility Siting Act (MFSA) and applications for grants of right-of-way or special use permits from the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), BLM, USFS, DOE, and U.S. Department of Agriculture. These state and federal agencies are proceeding with a joint environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). BLM is the lead federal agency for the NEPA review process, and MDEQ is the lead state agency for MFSA and MEPA review. As co-leads, the BLM and MDEQ will develop an EIS designed to meet the standards of analysis required for compliance with both federal and state regulations.

BLM is responsible for issuance of a grant of right-of-way for BLM federally managed lands by authority of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA). BLM offices potentially affected by the proposed action include the Burley, Shoshone, and Upper Snake Field Offices in Idaho and the Butte and Dillon Field Offices in Montana.

Montana DEQ will oversee the MFSA application and will be the lead state agency from Montana for the Federal/State EIS jointly prepared with the BLM. The Federal/State EIS will meet the requirements for a report under MFSA and provide information on which to base findings required by MFSA before certification. If approved, MDEQ would issue a Certificate of Compliance under the authority of MFSA.

The USFS would issue a special use permit or easement. National Forests potentially affected by the proposed action include the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in Idaho and the Helena and Beaverhead-Deerlodge National Forests in Montana.

The Montana DNRC, DOE, and USFS will serve as cooperating agencies since the project crosses lands under the jurisdiction of these agencies. The ARS has been invited to participate in the project as a cooperating agency.

There is no state siting law in Idaho. Construction cannot commence until all local, state, and federal permits/regulatory requirements are met.

How You Can Participate

The BLM and MDEQ encourage you to send us your comments concerning the power line project as proposed and feasible alternative locations and designs, issues to consider in the environmental analysis, possible mitigation measures, and any other information relevant to the proposed action. There are two ways to provide your comments:

1. Attend the public scoping meetings and let the agencies know your concerns, questions, and issues; or
2. Provide written comments in response to this scoping letter.

Public Scoping Meetings

BLM and MDEQ will hold public meetings to obtain input on potential impacts, alternatives, and mitigation. MDEQ will also solicit input on concerns related to the certificate of compliance and water quality permits. To provide the public an opportunity to review the proposal and project information, the BLM and MDEQ expect to hold at least three meetings in Idaho and three meetings in Montana along the proposed route. The meetings will be conducted in an "open house" format with the BLM and MDEQ staff, and project proponents will be available to explain project details and gather information from interested individuals or groups. The Agencies will host open houses in the following communities:

Montana:

- September 9, 2008 - Butte, Copper King Hotel, 4655 Harrison Ave.
- September 10, 2008 - Three Forks, Three Forks High School, 210 East Neal
- September 11, 2008 - Dillon, University of Montana Western, Lewis and Clark Room

Idaho:

- September 16, 2008 - Twin Falls, Red Lion Canyon Springs, 1357 Blue Lakes Blvd. N.
- September 17, 2008 - Arco, Arco/Butte Business Incubator Center, 159 N. Idaho St.
- September 18, 2008 - Idaho Falls, Hilton Garden Inn, 700 Lindsay Blvd.

All public meetings will be held 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. mountain daylight savings time.

Provide Written Comments

You are invited to take this opportunity to provide us with comments, issues, concerns and/or recommendations on the proposed project.
You may send written comments to:

Mark A. Mackiewicz, PMP, National Project Manager, Bureau of Land Management, Washington Office, C/O Price Field Office, 125 South 600 West, Price, Utah 84501

and

Greg Hallsten, EIS Coordinator, Director's Office, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, PO Box 200901, Helena, Montana, 59620-0901 or DEQMSTI@mt.gov

Comments need to be received by **October 10, 2008.**

For More Information

Information on the MSTI MFSA Application and associated resource reports are available at:
http://www.blm.gov/mt/st/en/prog/lands_realty/projects.htm and
http://deq.mt.gov/MFS/MSTI/MSTIindex.asp

If you have questions about this project, you may contact BLM representatives Mark Mackiewicz, Project Manager at (435) 636-3616 or MDEQ representative Tom Ring, Project Manager at (406) 444-6785.

Freedom of Information Act Considerations

Your input is important and will be considered in the environmental analysis process. Based on the issues identified, the agencies will decide the appropriate level of environmental analysis and documentation. All comment submittals must include the commenter's name and street address. Comments including the names and addresses of the respondent will be available for public inspection at the above offices during its business hours (7:45 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except federal holidays. Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or any other personal identifying information in your comment, please be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information may be publicly available at any time. While you can request your personal identifying information be withheld from public review, we cannot guarantee that we can do so.

Any persons wanting to be added to a mailing list of interested parties can call or write to BLM or MDEQ as described in this notice. Additional informational meetings may be conducted throughout the process to keep the public informed of the progress of the EIS.

We hope you will join us at one of the scoping meetings listed above.

Sincerely,

Tim Bozorth

Tim Bozorth
Field Manager
Dillon Field Office
Bureau of Land Management

Sincerely,

Warren D. McCullough

Warren D. McCullough
Chief, Environmental Management Bureau
Montana Department of Environmental Quality