



BLM finds no significant impact on environment by power line

By JOHN PLESTINA
Ely Times Reporter

Ely BLM District Manager John Ruhs signed the Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) on July 30 for the southern portion of the Southwest Intertie Project (SWIP).

The Ely BLM office also has finalized the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project.

Great Basin, LLC, plans to extend the SWIP from near Burley, Idaho, to just outside of Las Vegas. But this FNSI and EA are only for the southern portion -- from Ely to Las Vegas.

LS Power is the parent company of Great Basin, LLC, and is the developer of the proposed White Pine Energy Station (WPES), one of two proposed coal-fired power plants in White Pine County and one of three in Nevada.

The proposed 500-kilovolt transmission line would transmit energy from the WPES to Las Vegas.

But LS Power has said it wants to build the SWIP even if the power plant were not built.

Great Basin, LLC, also must have its construction, operation and maintenance plan for the southern segment of the project approved by the Ely BLM office. The Wells BLM office is conducting the permitting process for the northern portion of SWIP from Ely to Burley.

"This transmission line has a lot of benefits that goes along with it," said Luke Papez, LS Power's associate project manager for the White Pine Energy Station. "It connects the two transmission systems currently within the state. It allows access for renewable energy in the state."

He added that the SWIP would increase the reliability of the electrical grid in Nevada.

"Construction could begin next year," Papez said. The company is targeting to be fully permitted by the end of this year.

Mark Milburn, LS Power's director of project development, said the line would provides a significant number of benefits for Nevada and the western grid. "It is our desire to realize the benefits as soon as possible," he said. "It also brings significant economic benefits both directly and indirectly to White Pine County and the surrounding area."

Sierra Pacific Resources, the parent company of Nevada Power and Sierra Pacific Power, also proposes to build a north-south transmission line in conjunction with the Ely Energy Station (EES), the other proposed coal-fired power plant in White Pine County. SPR maintains that its transmission line could make wind farms, solar and geothermal energy production in Eastern Nevada feasible.

"We have the northern and southern territory," said Mark Severts, SPR's project communications director.

He said SPR plans to move forward with its transmission line separate from the SWIP, as well as the completion of the permitting process and eventual construction phase of the EES.

The WPES and EES are both proposed to be built in Steptoe Valley north of McGill. Both projects have met opposition from environmental groups.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the 1,590-megawatt, hybrid-cooled WPES is due to be published later this month.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the two 750-megawatt units that make up the EEC is scheduled for public review and comment in November of this year.

(Ely Times Editor Kent Harper contributed to this report.)