NOTICE OF PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

This letter is to inform you that the Midstate Electric Cooperative, Inc. Power Line Relocation Environmental Assessment (EA) is nearing completion. Public comment is now being requested for 30 days. This letter provides a summary of the purpose and need for action and the alternatives developed and analyzed. If you requested an EA during the scoping period, an EA will be provided with this mailing. Copies of the EA are available on request at the address found at the end of this letter or may be viewed at the website, also found at the end of this letter.

Location: The project area is located just north of the Cascade Lakes National Scenic Byway (Highway 46), near the Inn of the Seventh Mountain, approximately three miles southwest of Bend, Oregon (see Vicinity Map). The project lies within portions of Township 18 South, Range 11 East, Sections 10, 11, 14, 15 & 22 Willamette Meridian (see Alternative 1 No Action). The proposed project area is located in Scenic Views Management Area 9, Deer Habitat Management Area 7 and Intensive Recreation Management Area 11, as designated under the LRMP. The project area boundaries are Road 4610 to the west, Road 4601 to the north, the Forest boundary to the east, and Highway 46 and existing power line to the south and includes approximately 4,900 acres. The area is located east of the Northwest Forest Plan boundary line and lies outside the range of the northern spotted owl.

Purpose and Need for Action: The Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District received an “Application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands” from Midstate, who had received a request to remove their line from private lands. This application proposes to reroute a portion of an existing 69 kilovolt power line. The power line currently crosses NFS lands and two separate parcels of private land. Additionally, this power line is over 50 years old, and poles need to be replaced, as it was originally designed to function reliably for 30 years.

The primary purposes for relocating the power line are to replace the infrastructure on this portion of the line in anticipation of future upgrades of this line; and to reduce the number of highway crossings and upgrade the scenic views along Highway 46.

Alternative locations across the Deschutes National Forest were reviewed and considered for this project. Field reconnaissance in 2004 identified four routes that fit most of the above criteria. These routes are all within the same general area; however, there are some differences in specific locations between routes (see attached Alternatives 2 to 5 maps).

Preferred Alternative - Alternative 4:

This alternative reduces the amount of new power line corridor construction on National Forest System lands from that proposed in Alternative 2 (Proposed Action). This route is shown in attached Alternative 4 map. Most of the existing power line located on National Forest System lands would remain. Approximately 2,000 feet of line would be rerouted, all within the northeast corner of Section 14, which would replace approximately 2,600 feet of existing line on National Forest land.

The actions under this alternative would be the same for Alternatives 2 & 3; however, relatively few trees would need to be removed, as the area is sparsely treed. Additionally, the majority of the new line would still be located on privately owned land that is along the Forest boundary in Section 11 and west of Section 12. The new line would diverge from the existing line in the northeast corner of Section 14, and continue north, to the southeast quarter corner of Section 11. The new line would be located approximately 1,000 feet west of the existing line, and include an aerial crossing of Highway 46. This alternative entails construction of approximately .4 miles of new line on National Forest System lands and removal of approximately .5 miles of
line. An associated action on private land would be to move the existing line on the far easterly side of Section 11 to the west, along, but not on the National Forest boundary, to align with the new Section 14 line on Forest Service land.

Other Alternatives Analyzed

Alternative 1 (No Action): The No Action Alternative is a baseline by which to measure relative changes that would result from implementation of the action alternatives. Under this alternative, the proposed project would not take place. A new route would not be developed at any other location. (see attached Alternative 1 map)

Alternative 2 (Proposed Action):

This route is shown in attached Alternative 2 map. It begins on the south side of Highway 46 and terminates at a location to the north in Section 11. This route diverges from the existing route, just south of Highway 46 in the southwest corner of Section 22.

This action would consist of constructing a power line corridor for approximately 3.5 miles. Heavy equipment needed would include: a grapple piler, a bulldozer, large trucks for removing logs and hauling power poles, line truck for power auger, and flatbed truck to haul conductor line and supplies. The right-of-way will be 30 feet wide. Construction would consist of: clearing trees, drilling 10-foot deep holes to install wooden utility poles (average height of pole is 70 feet), and installation of the conductor wire. Maintenance access would be limited to a primitive road for a pick-up truck to patrol the right-of-way. The line would be single pole construction, with no cross arms. Guy wires would be needed at angle points (estimated to be two locations). Additionally, approximately 3.5 miles of existing power line would be removed from federal and private lands.

Alternative 3: A route was identified that would result in fewer impacts to recreation trails than the proposed action. This route is shown in attached Alternative 3 map. It begins on the north side of Highway 46 and terminates to the north in Section 11. This route diverges from the existing route, just north of Highway 46 in the northeast corner of Section 22.

The actions under this alternative would be the same as Alternative 2, except the line would be placed about ¼ mile east of Alternative 2. It entails 2.8 miles of new line construction and 2.8 miles of line removed.

Alternative 5: This route is shown in attached Alternative 5 map. Most of the existing power line located on National Forest System lands would remain. Approximate 2,000 feet of line would be rerouted, all within the northeast corner of Section 14.

This alternative is the same as Alternative 4, except that the power line crossing Highway 46 would be underground. This would entail burying the power line from the point where it diverges from the existing line, and continue below ground until it connects with the private property-Forest boundary (about 2,000 feet of underground line). This would entail using heavy equipment and blasting to dig the ditch and bury the line.

Public Comment. Substantive comments on the project must be postmarked no later than 30 days after the date of publication of this legal notice in The Bulletin, Bend, Oregon, and should be addressed to the Responsible Official, Leslie A.C. Weldon, in care of District Ranger Phil Cruz., 1230 NE Third Street, Suite A-262, Bend, Oregon, 97701. (Phone: (541) 383-4760; FAX: (541) 383-4700; e-mail address: comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-frock@fs.fed.us). Those submitting hand-delivered comments may do so during regular office hours, 7:45AM to 4:30PM, Monday through Friday, except legal holidays. Those submitting electronic copies must do so only to the e-mail address listed above, must put the project name in the subject line, and must either submit comments as part of the e-mail message or as an attachment only in one of the following three formats: Microsoft Word, rich text format (rtf), or Adobe Portable Document Format (pdf).
Only those who submit timely and substantive comments will be accepted as appellants. For appeal eligibility, each individual or representative from each organization submitting substantive comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request. All comments must be fully consistent with the requirements of the June 4, 2003 regulations at 36 CFR 215.6(3).

Anyone wishing to review the project file or obtain additional information on the project should contact Mark Macfarlane at (541) 383-4769 or by email at <comments-pacificnorthwest-deschutes-bend-ftrock@fs.fed.us>. The EA can also be viewed at the Deschutes National Forest website: www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon/projects/units/bendrock/index.shtml.

Sincerely,

PHIL CRUZ
Bend-Fort Rock District Ranger

Enclosures (3)