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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rural Utilities Service

Basin Electric Power Cooperative: Deer Creek Station

AGENCY: Rural Utilities Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of Availability of Final Environmental Impact Statement.

SUMMARY: The Rural Utilities Service (RUS) and the Western Area Power Administration (Western) have issued a Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the proposed Deer Creek Station project in Brookings and Deuel Counties, South Dakota. The Final EIS was prepared pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (U.S.C. 4231 *et seq.*) in accordance with the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500–1508), RUS's NEPA implementing regulations (7 CFR part 1794), and Western's NEPA implementing regulations (10 CFR part 1021). Western is the lead federal agency as defined at 40 CFR 1501.5; RUS is a cooperating agency. The purpose of the Final EIS is to evaluate the potential environmental impacts of and alternatives to Basin Electric Power Cooperative's (Basin Electric) application for a RUS loan and a Western interconnection agreement to construct the proposed 300 megawatt (MW) Deer Creek Station in Brookings and Deuel Counties, South Dakota (Project). The proposed facility would include a new natural gas-fired combustion turbine set, a heat recovery steam generator (HRSG), and a steam turbine generator set.

DATES: Written comments on this Final EIS will be accepted on or before June 28, 2010, following the publication of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's notice of availability for this FEIS in the **Federal Register**.

ADDRESSES: To obtain copies of the Final EIS or further information, contact: Ms. Lauren McGee, Environmental Scientist, USDA, Rural Utilities Service, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW., Stop 1571, Room 2239–S, Washington, DC 20250–1571, telephone: (202) 720–1482, fax: (202) 690–0649, or e-mail: lauren.mcgee@wdc.usda.gov.

A copy of the Final EIS has been sent to affected federal, state, and local government agencies and to interested parties and can be viewed online at: <http://www.usda.gov/rus/water/ees/eis.htm>.

Copies of the Final EIS will also be available for public review at the following locations (hours vary; contact individual repositories for available times):

Brookings Public Library 515 3rd Street
Brookings, SD; telephone: (605) 692–9407

SDSU Hilton M. Briggs Library, South
Dakota State University, Brookings,
SD; telephone: (605) 688–5570.

Deubrook Community Library, 100
School Avenue, White, SD.

Elkton City Hall, Elkton, SD.
Siverson Public Library, 100 W.

Garfield, Hendricks, MN.
Brookings County Commission Office,
314 6th Avenue, Brookings, SD.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Basin Electric's proposed Project is to construct, own, operate, and maintain the Deer Creek Station Energy Facility, a 300 MW combined-cycle natural gas generation facility, water pipeline, transmission lines, transmission interconnection(s), and other associated facilities in Brookings and Deuel counties in eastern South Dakota. The purpose for the proposed Project is to serve increased load demand for electric power in the eastern portion of Basin Electric's service area. In 2007, Basin Electric prepared a forecast showing load and capability surpluses/deficits through the year 2021. The forecast predicted that by 2014, there will be a deficit of 800–900 MW for the eastern portion of its service area. The proposed Project's addition of 300 MW of generation will help meet Basin Electric's future energy requirements.

On February 6, 2009, Western published in the **Federal Register** a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the Deer Creek Station. The EIS focused on potential impacts to the following resources: soils, topography and

geology, water resources, air quality, biological resources, the acoustic environment, recreation, cultural and historic resources, visual resources, transportation, farmland, land use, human health and safety, the socioeconomic environment, environmental justice, and cumulative effects. On February 26, 2010, the Rural Utilities Service published its Notice of Availability of the Draft EIS for the proposed project in the **Federal Register**. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency acknowledged receipt of the Draft EIS on February 5, 2010, from Western. The 45-day comment period ended on March 22, 2010. Because few comments were received which did not result in the substantial modification of the alternatives or the environmental analysis in the Draft EIS, Western and RUS prepared an abbreviated Final EIS to address the comments received.

Basin Electric's proposed Project is subject to the jurisdiction of the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission (SDPUC) which has regulatory authority for siting power plants and transmission lines within the State. Basin Electric will submit an application for an Energy Conversion Facility Permit and a Route Permit to the SDPUC. The SDPUC permits would authorize Basin Electric to construct the proposed Project under South Dakota rules and regulations.

After considering various ways to meet these future needs, Basin Electric identified construction of the proposed Project as its best course of action. This EIS considered 17 alternatives to meet the future energy requirements of the eastern portion of its service area. These alternatives were evaluated in terms of cost-effectiveness, technical feasibility, and environmental factors.

The EIS analyzes in detail the no action alternative and the proposed action (Deer Creek station and related facilities) at two separate locations: White Site I (Brookings County, T111N R48W, Section 25 NE Quarter) and White Site II (Brookings County, T111N R48W, Section 2 NW Quarter). The proposed action at White Site I has been identified as the preferred alternative.

Because the proposed Project may involve action in floodplains or wetlands, this Notice of Availability also serves as a notice of proposed floodplain or wetland action. The EIS includes a floodplain/wetland

assessment and floodplain/wetland statement of findings.

Any action by RUS related to the proposed Project will be subject to, and contingent upon, compliance with all relevant Federal, state and local environmental laws and regulations, and completion of the environmental review requirements as prescribed in RUS's Environmental Policies and Procedures, 7 CFR part 1794, as amended.

Dated: June 7, 2010.

James F. Elliott,

*Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator,
Electric Programs, Rural Utilities Service.*

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

Rangeland Allotment Management Planning on the Fall River West and Oglala Geographic Areas, Fall River and Pine Ridge Ranger Districts, Nebraska National Forest

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Second revised notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement.

SUMMARY: The USDA, Forest Service, will prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) analyzing the management of rangeland vegetation resources, which includes livestock grazing, on the National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Oglala Geographic Area (OGA) of the Oglala National Grassland on the Pine Ridge Ranger District and the West Geographic Area (WGA) of the Buffalo Gap National Grassland on the Fall River Ranger District of the Nebraska National Forest (Analysis Area) areas as mapped by the 2001 Nebraska National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). A Notice of Intent (NOI) for this project was published February 22, 2008 (73 No. 36 FR 9760-9762). More than six months have elapsed since the projected draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) date in that original NOI. This revised NOI is being issued to update the project schedule. There will be a record of decision (ROD) for each geographic area.

Proposed management actions would be implemented beginning in the year 2012. The agency gives notice of the full environmental analysis and decision-making process that will occur on the proposal so interested and affected people may become aware of how they

may participate in the process and contribute to the final decision.

DATES: Comments concerning the scope of the analysis must be received within 30 days after publication in the **Federal Register**. The draft environmental impact statement is expected February 12, 2011 and the final environmental impact statement is expected September 1, 2011.

ADDRESSES: Send written comments pertaining to this project to Carla Loop, Oglala and Fall River West Geographic Area RAMP, 125 North Main, Chadron, NE 69337. Comments may also be submitted electronically at nnfinfo@fs.fed.us. Please enter "RAMP" in the subject line.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: For further information about the Oglala Geographic Area on the Oglala National Grassland call Lora O'Rourke, Co-Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at 308-432-0300. For further information about the West Geographic Area on the Buffalo Gap National Grassland, call Robert Novotny, Co-Interdisciplinary Team Leader at 605745-4107.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: Vegetation resources on approximately 94,174 acres of NFS lands lying within the Oglala National Grassland in Sioux and Dawes Counties of northwest Nebraska, and approximately 117,548 acres of NFS lands lying within the Buffalo Gap National Grassland in Fall River County of southwest South Dakota, are being analyzed to determine if and how existing conditions differ from desired conditions outlined in the 2001 Nebraska National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan).

Vegetation in the Analysis Area is characteristic of mixed-grass prairie and lesser amounts of ponderosa pine/juniper habitats. Short-grass species include blue grama, buffalograss, and upland sedges. Mid-grass species include western wheatgrass, green needlegrass, and to a lesser extent sideoats grama. Shrubs include Wyoming big sagebrush, greasewood, and yucca glauca. Some creeks transverse the area and support plains cottonwood, green ash, and willow.

A large portion of the Analysis Area evolved under a history of homesteading in the early twentieth century, and a prolonged drought period combined with the economic depression of the late 1920's and early 1930's caused many of these homesteads to fail. Starting in 1930's, land was purchased through the northwestern Nebraska and southwestern South Dakota under the Land Utilization Project initiated by the Agricultural

Adjustment Administration. This continued with the Bankhead Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937, which was designed to develop a program of land conservation. Administration of these lands was turned over to the Soil Conservation Service the following year and transferred to the United States Forest Service in 1954.

Today the Oglala and Buffalo Gap National Grasslands support and provide a variety of multiple resource uses and values. Livestock ranching operations in the area depend on National Grassland acreage to create logical and efficient management units. Cattle and sheep, in accordance with 10-year term and/or annual temporary livestock grazing permits, are currently authorized to graze the allotments within the Analysis Area. In order to determine how existing resource conditions compare to desired conditions, data from monitoring and analysis (historical and present) will be used. During the past 5-7 years, drought conditions have impacted plant vigor, canopy, and litter cover in most parts of the Analysis Area.

Purpose and Need for Action: The purpose of this project is to determine if livestock grazing will continue to be authorized on all, none, or portions, of the 41 allotments in the Fall River West GA and the 35 allotments in the Oglala GA. And if livestock grazing is to continue, how to best maintain or achieve desired conditions and meet forest plan objectives, standards and guidelines.

The action is needed to ensure that the project areas are meeting forest plan desired conditions for plant species composition, vegetation structure, and habitat for sharp-tailed grouse, sage grouse, and black-tailed prairie dog (management indicator species) and swift fox (r2 sensitive species).

There is also a need to review existing livestock management strategies and, if necessary, update them to implement 2001 Forest Plan direction and meet the requirements of section 504 of Public Law 104-19 (Rescissions Act, signed 7/27/95). The 2001 Forest Plan states that livestock grazing may occur as one of the multiple uses on the Nebraska National Forest, consistent with standards and guidelines. Livestock grazing is currently occurring in the analysis area under the direction of existing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) and through direction provided in annual operating instructions (AOIs). The results of this analysis may require issuing or modifying grazing permits and AMPs including reductions of permitted livestock numbers and/or modifications of the grazing season.