

Corridor EIS Archives

From: corridoreiswebmaster@anl.gov
Sent: Friday, June 30, 2006 12:48 PM
To: corridoreisarchives,
Subject: Preliminary Draft Corridor Map Comment M0035

Attachments: BCAEnergyCorridorMapComments_M0035.doc



BCAEnergyCorridor
MapComments_M...

Thank you for your comment, Erik Molvar.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is M0035. Once the comment response document has been published, please refer to the comment tracking number to locate the response.

Comment Date: June 30, 2006 12:47:53PM CDT

Preliminary Draft Corridor Map Comment: M0035

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Attachment: C:\Documents and Settings\Erik Molvar\My Documents\erik's product\BLM Inventory\BCAEnergyCorridorMapComments.doc

Comment Submitted:
Dear Folks,

Attached are the comments of BCA on the proposed Enbergy Corridor Map routings.

Erik Molvar

Questions about submitting comments over the Web? Contact us at:
corridoreiswebmaster@anl.gov or call the Preliminary Draft Corridor Map Webmaster at
(630)252-6182.



June 29, 2006

Office of Electricity Delivery and Energy Reliability
Room 8H-033
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Folks,

The following are the comments of Biodiversity Conservation Alliance on the Energy Corridor PEIS Wyoming map. We are limiting ourselves to Wyoming because this is the area for which we have great familiarity and expertise. Overall, most proposed energy corridor routes do not appear to pose major environmental concerns, but there are two segments that do (discussed below), and these segments could readily be re-routed along alternate existing utility corridors that do not pose major concerns about lands and wildlife.

It appears that the proposed energy corridors in Wyoming often follow existing powerline or pipeline routes. To the extent that energy corridors utilize existing transportation or utility rights-of-way, this will minimize the additional environmental impacts of the corridors. In the Red Desert, we appreciate that proposed corridors appear to follow Interstate 80, which already hosts pipeline and fiber-optic lines. This is a good place to put the energy corridor.

Energy corridors should also avoid the viewsheds of historic sites and trails such as the Cherokee Trail, Overland Trail, and Oregon Trail.

To the extent that the Energy Corridor PEIS encompasses electrical transmission lines, these lines should be buried, rather than overhead, power lines.

Shirley Basin Segment

The Draft Map shows a proposed energy corridor running through the Shirley Basin, presumably following the powerline corridor south to an idle uranium mine and then following the highway southward from there. The Shirley Basin is unsuitable for energy corridors because it is one of only two black-footed ferret recovery areas in North America that have viable ferret populations. The black-footed ferret is entirely reliant on prairie dogs as a food source, and prairie dogs in turn are heavily impacted by overhead transmission lines, which serve as perches and nesting platforms for raptors, thereby concentrating predation impacts on the prairie dogs. In addition, the area is part of a scenic drive between Medicine Bow and Casper which would be negatively impacted by the visual intrusion of powerlines.

There is a good alternative routing that runs north from Sinclair, runs through the Shirley Mountains and then north-northeast, staying east of the Pedro Mountains as it roughly follows the Kortés Dam Road. There are already overhead powerlines along this entire route, so added transmission lines would not have a major impact.

Thunder Basin Segment

In crossing the southern part of the Thunder Basin National Grassland, the proposed energy corridor appears to follow a pipeline right of way along East Logan Draw and past the Steinle Ranch. A far preferable routing would be to follow the railroad tracks several miles to the west. The railway line has major visual and ecological impacts, while the present pipeline corridor does not. It would therefore be superior to follow the railway as an energy transmission corridor in order to concentrate the major impacts, particularly in light of the fact that electricity transmission lines have far-reaching effects both visually and ecologically. This routing adjustment would take only a slight westward displacement of the energy corridor.

Overall Concerns

The proposed routes in the PEIS should consider impacts to sage grouse and prairie dog colonies, and avoid their sensitive habitats to the maximum possible extent. Both sage grouse and prairie dogs are sensitive to raptor predation, and raptors roost and nest on overhead powerlines, and would concentrate their foraging activities on nearby sage grouse leks and prairie dog colonies, to the detriment of the prey species. In particular, prairie dog complexes of ten thousand acres or more are potential reintroduction sites for the Endangered black-footed ferret, and should be given a wide berth.

Transmission towers may be particularly attractive as nest sites for ravens, and Steenhof et al. (1993) reported that 133 pairs of ravens had colonized transmission towers on a single stretch of powerline in Idaho during its first 10 years of existence. Gilmer and Wiehe (1977) found that nest success for ferruginous hawks was slightly lower for transmission towers than other nest sites, and noted that high winds sometimes blew tower nests away. Steenhof et al. (1993) also found that transmission tower nests tended to be blown down, but found that nest success was not lower on towers for ferruginous hawks and was significantly higher on towers for golden eagles. In North Dakota, Gilmer and Stewart (1983) found that ferruginous hawk nest success was highest for powerline towers and lowest for nests in hardwood trees. Thus, although powerlines can be designed to minimize impacts to raptors, these corridors should be sited more than 2 miles away from prairie dog colonies and more than 5 miles away from sage grouse leks (in concordance with USFWS guidelines on tall structures) to prevent major impacts to these sensitive prey species.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this proposal, and please keep us apprised of any future NEPA documentation concerning this project.

Sincerely yours,

Erik Molvar

Literature Cited

Gilmer, D.S., and R.E. Stewart. 1983. Ferruginous hawk populations and habitat use in North Dakota. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 47:146-157.

Gilmer, D.S., and J.M. Wiehe. 1977. Nesting by ferruginous hawks and other raptors on high voltage powerline towers. *Prairie Nat.* 9:1-10.

Steenhof, K., M.N. Kochert, and J.A. Roppe. 1993. Nesting by raptors and common ravens on electrical transmission line towers. *J. Wildl. Manage.* 57:271-281.