



Next Steps

Final EIS and Records of Decision (RODs)

The Final EIS will include responses to all substantive public comments received on the Draft EIS. WAPA will not issue its ROD until at least 30 days after the issuance of the Final EIS. Release of the Final EIS is anticipated in Spring 2017. The U.S. Forest Service, as the project's cooperating agency, will be using the information in the Final EIS to prepare and issue a Draft ROD for public comment. After the 45-day objection and resolution period, the Forest Service will publish its Final ROD. The U.S. Forest Service ROD could authorize the project where it crosses National Forest System lands.

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Or Current Resident

Selection of Agency Preferred Alternative

Draft EIS

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) identified Western Area Power Administration's (WAPA's) Purpose and Need and Key Issues in coordination with the Forest Service. Key Issues included:

- Effects of new right-of-way (ROW) acquisition;
- Effects of the project on scenic travel corridors;
- Effects of new road construction in areas with steep topography;
- Effects on recreation;
- Effects on protected areas; and
- Effects on existing infrastructure.

The alternatives evaluated (A, A1, A2, B, C, C1, D, and No Action) and analyzed in the Draft EIS were shaped by public participation in scoping meetings and transmission line routing workshops. WAPA assessed the potential impacts of each alternative on Key Issues and other environmental resources, and presented the results in the Draft EIS. The Agency Preferred Alternative was not identified in the Draft EIS. WAPA deferred that decision until agency and public comments on the Draft EIS could be considered because the public had not had the opportunity to review the alternatives or the analysis of their expected impacts. The Draft EIS was released in August 2014, which initiated a 45-day public review period.

During the review period, over 400 substantive comments were submitted by government agencies and the public. The major themes from agency and public comments were impacts to:

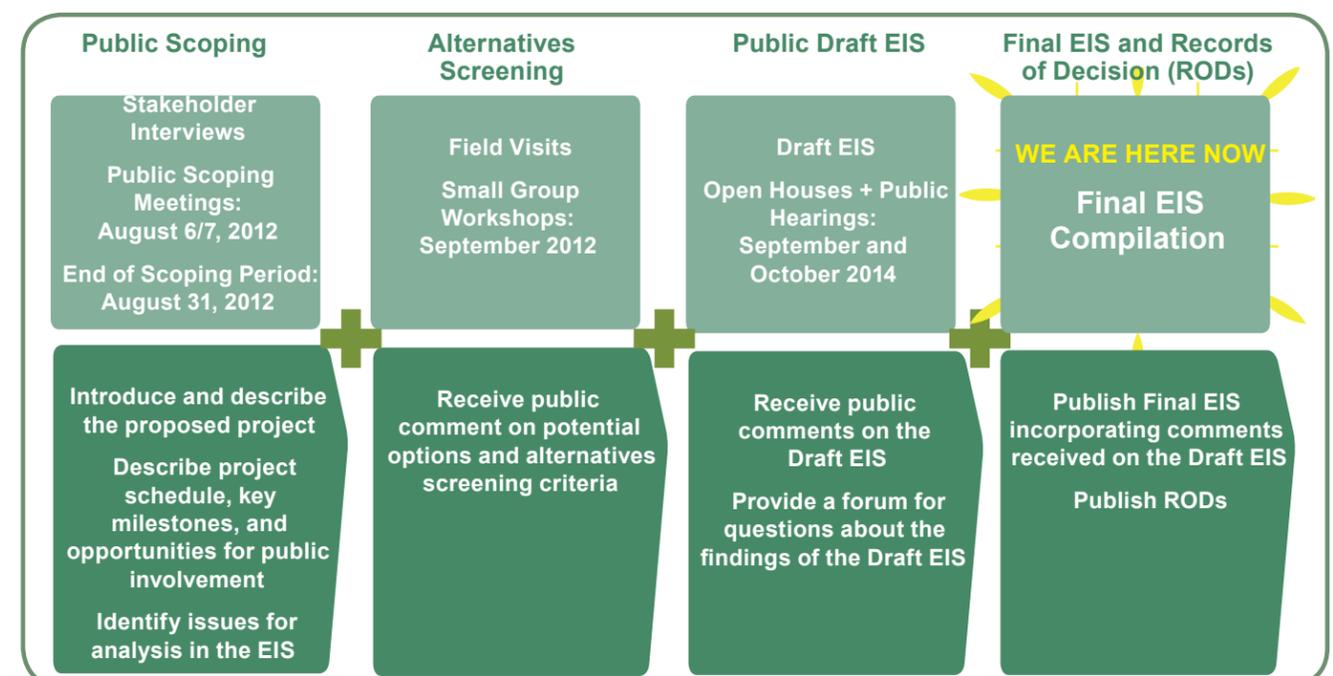
- Recreation and transportation resources as a result of the improvement of West Pole Hill Road;
- Visual resources; and
- Property values in subdivisions adjacent to the alternative alignments.

The majority of comments were generally categorized between east and west, preventing selection of a single whole alternative as the best option. WAPA divided each alternative into three regions (east, central, and west) for further analysis.

WAPA committed to publicly announce the selection of the Agency Preferred Alternative before a Final EIS was produced. This newsletter fulfills that commitment.

Agency Preferred Alternative Selection Process

WAPA selected the Agency Preferred Alternative after reviewing all the material developed during the Draft EIS process, including WAPA's Purpose and Need, impacts on Key Issues and other resources, and agency and public comments.



The Alternatives

Agency Preferred Alternative

WAPA used a composite of alternative selections to create a complete Agency Preferred Alternative. The figure below shows the Agency Preferred Alternative in blue, ROW to be abandoned in red and green, and additional highlights.

Agency Preferred Alternative, East Region

WAPA selected Alternative B for the Agency Preferred Alternative in the east region of the project. Alternative B best meets WAPA's Purpose and Need and avoids or minimizes impacts to Key Issues and environmental resources. The existing north line (in red) in the east region would be removed. A short section north of Pole Hill Substation and a fiber optic connection to Pinewood Dam would be retained through the Newell Lake View Subdivision area.

Agency Preferred Alternative, Central Region

In the central region, WAPA selected a combination of Alternatives B and C that most closely follows the existing Pole Hill Road as requested by local landowners, and thus reduces impacts to natural resources by minimizing access road construction and related project disturbance.

Agency Preferred Alternative, West Region

In the west region of the project, WAPA selected Alternative C with some modifications. Alternative C best meets WAPA's Purpose and Need by maximizing the use of adequate and accessible ROW while decommissioning the inadequate and inaccessible ROW on difficult terrain. Additionally, this alternative offers the lowest overall visual impacts to the project area, while being the most cost effective.

The Agency Preferred Alternative would be located in the valley to the north of Highway 36 to reduce the visual impact and eliminate two highway crossings. It would continue to traverse established neighborhoods making use of existing ROW that the residential development was designed around.

WAPA would not reconstruct West Pole Hill Road as part of the Agency Preferred Alternative in the west region, thus retaining the four-wheel drive challenge for OHV enthusiasts and leaving other recreational activity levels unchanged.

Reconstructing the line south of Highway 36 would require two line crossings of the highway and construction on steeper terrain, with more difficult and visible access to each structure.

Alternatives Not Selected

North Route alternatives (Alternatives A, A1, and A2) were eliminated from consideration due to very difficult terrain in the vicinity of The Notch and Mount Olympus, which WAPA considered bypassing. However, these possibilities were eliminated due to increased visual impacts from Estes Park.

Underground Alternatives A2 and C1 were considered and ultimately rejected due to technical issues, initial cost, and 80-year lifecycle cost considerations, as compared against the expected impacts to visual resources. Underground construction costs could increase overall cost by a factor of 2 or 3, depending on the time, equipment, and manpower needed to trench through rock formations.

Alternative D replaces both lines in kind but also does not best meet WAPA's Purpose and Need. Compared to the double-circuit steel structures, this alternative does not abandon one ROW and has higher 80-year lifecycle costs.

The No Action Alternative was not selected as it did not meet any of WAPA's Purpose and Need objectives. Ongoing maintenance activities would eventually rebuild both lines on a structure-by-structure basis and would not improve maintenance access or reduce safety risks.

