



**Department of Energy**  
Western Area Power Administration  
P.O. Box 281213  
Lakewood, CO 80228-8213

**APR 21 2015**

In Reply Refer To:  
DOE/EIS-0408

Dear Reader:

Enclosed is the Upper Great Plains Wind Energy Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Final PEIS) (DOE/EIS-0408). The Final PEIS has been prepared by the Western Area Power Administration (Western) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) as joint lead Federal agencies. The Final PEIS evaluates issues and environmental impacts associated with wind energy development within Western's Upper Great Plains Customer Service Region (UGP Region) and upon the Service's landscape-level grassland and wetland easements. Changes and improvements from public and interested party comments received on the Draft PEIS have been incorporated into this final document, and agency updates, corrections, and additions are also included. The Final PEIS will inform the public and interested parties of potential environmental impacts associated with implementing each of the three program alternatives and the no action alternative.

This Final PEIS has been prepared by Western and the Service in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended (42 U.S.C. §§ 4321-4347); the Council on Environmental Quality regulations for implementing the procedural provisions of NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508); and the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and U.S. Department of the Interior NEPA procedures (10 CFR parts 1021 and 1022 and 516 DM 1-7). The area covered by the Final PEIS encompasses all or parts of the states of Iowa, Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota that fall within the UGP Region boundaries. Western's UGP Region proposes to develop and implement a comprehensive region-wide management program for wind energy generation project interconnections in response to an increasing number of interconnection requests. The requests are primarily from independent wind energy project developers who wish to interconnect their projects to the UGP Region's transmission system, in order to move their generation to market. Currently, Western addresses each request for interconnection separately, including National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance.

The Service maintains a grassland and wetland easement program to support and enhance waterfowl populations in the Prairie Pothole Region. The Service has developed a plan that will, in some circumstances, allow partial release of an easement for wind energy generation purposes, only with defined conditions and on a specified area, in exchange for additional easement acreage being conveyed to the Service. A streamlined approach for compliance with NEPA and ESA for future site-specific wind energy development projects would result from this Final PEIS, shortening process times and benefitting both the agencies and project developers.

The objective of the proposed program would be to support the processing of the interconnection requests, including NEPA analyses, by having already addressed generic environmental

interconnection concerns and issues in a Programmatic EIS. The Final PEIS analyzes, to the extent practicable, the impacts resulting from development of wind energy generation projects and the effectiveness of mitigation measures, standard construction practices, and best management practices in reducing potential impacts. Many of the potential impacts resulting from wind energy infrastructure development, including siting wind turbines, access roads, underground collector lines, overhead lines, and substations, are well known. Similarly, effective mitigation measures and best management practices have been developed to reduce the environmental impacts of constructing and operating wind energy developments. The program has been structured to complement Western's Open Access Transmission Service Tariff, which includes procedures for addressing wind-energy project interconnection requests.

As mentioned above, Western and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) are joint lead Federal agencies for the PEIS process. The U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rural Utility Services, have participated as cooperating agencies.

In conjunction with the PEIS process, Western and the Service have collaborated on a Programmatic Biological Assessment (Programmatic BA) that covers every listed, proposed, and candidate species in the UGP Region. This Programmatic BA has been submitted to the Service's Ecological Services Field Office for review, and a letter of concurrence from that office is expected shortly. Wind energy project developers who agree to implement the identified best management practices and avoidance and minimization measures for each species that could occur in their project location will satisfy the requirements of Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, and will thus be covered by the Programmatic BA. This process will greatly streamline Section 7 consultation, and expedite environmental compliance for future wind energy project developers.

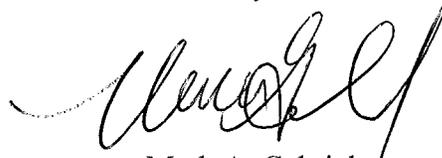
The UGP Region Final PEIS and the Programmatic BA, along with other project information, are posted on the project Web site at: <http://plainswindeis.anl.gov>. For CD copies of the Final PEIS or the Programmatic BA please contact:

Mail: Matt Marsh  
Regional Environmental Manager  
Upper Great Plains Customer Service Region  
Western Area Power Administration  
P.O. Box 35800  
Billings, MT 59107-5800  
E-mail: [mmarsh@wapa.gov](mailto:mmarsh@wapa.gov)

Please include "UGP Region Wind PEIS" in the subject line of your email message.

Thank you for your continued interest in the UGP Region Wind Energy PEIS. We appreciate the information and suggestions you have contributed to this process. Should you have any questions, please contact Matt Marsh at (406) 255-2810.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark A. Gabriel', written in a cursive style.

Mark A. Gabriel  
Administrator

Enclosure

bcc:

A7400 (RF, Wieringa)

R. Harris, B0000.BL, Billings, MT

M. Marsh, B0400.BL, Billings, MT

L. Hanebury, B0403.BL, Billings, MT

A7400:MWieringa:x7448:lou:04/07/15:Dear Reader UGPR Wind FPEIS