

Yellowstone National Park, Lake Cell Tower and Wireless Communications Plan Amendment

This notice details the National Park Service's decision-making process about a proposed right-of-way permit allowing construction of a wireless communications facility (WCF) within Yellowstone National Park. The WCF would allow phone service to the Lake and Fishing Bridge developed areas within the park. The project proponent, Verizon Communications, would use an existing utility site to co-locate a new 100-foot cell tower and associated equipment. The decision to allow WCF construction at the Lake and Fishing Bridge developed areas was made in the 2008 Wireless Communications Services Plan Environmental Assessment (2008 Wireless Plan EA) and its associated Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). The new proposal was reviewed to determine if the project's impacts were adequately analyzed in the original documents. The park's interdisciplinary team determined that the proposed action results in no or minor impacts, and that no extraordinary circumstances apply, as documented in a categorical exclusion.

We are also using this opportunity to announce a minor change to the 2008 Wireless Plan EA. The categorical exclusion also amends the *Wireless Communications Services Plan Environmental Assessment FONSI* that indicated the park would issue a notice in the *Federal Register*. Environmental Assessments and *Federal Register* notices for telecommunications right-of-way permits are required for projects if an agency did not previously analyze the alternatives, evaluate the potential impacts, and identify mitigation measures. Because alternatives, impacts, and mitigation measures were analyzed in the 2008 Wireless Services Plan EA and subsequent FONSI, no *Federal Register* notice is required by NPS policy. The Lake cell tower was the only cell tower approved in the FONSI for the 2008 Wireless Services Plan EA. No future *Federal Register* notices on this topic are anticipated.

The proposed cellular site would be at an existing utility site and next to a buried water tank on a 100-foot rise above the Lake government/administrative area and 700 feet below the top of the Elephant Back ridge. Park personnel selected the proposed site amongst other locations as the best place to minimize impacts to public views. The proposed site is also close to electrical power and telephone lines. There is access to an existing service road. And the tower can broadcast signals to the targeted area from the proposed location (see Alternative C in the Wireless EA).

Pending approval of a right-of-way permit by the NPS Intermountain Regional Director, the service provider would construct the WCF when construction scheduling and weather permit, likely late fall 2012, or late spring 2013. The project will consist of a 100-foot tall grey steel lattice tower, a 12 by 26-foot single story equipment building, a propane generator, a 57 by 26 by 6-foot tall chain link fence enclosure, underground electrical power lines, and approximately 0.45 mile of communications circuit conduit buried under or directly adjacent to the existing service road and to the nearest telephone service utility pedestal in the housing area.

Design submittals indicate a tower that reaches 30 feet above the neighboring 70-foot-high (average) tree canopy. The Wireless EA Design Standards and Construction Requirements state that towers taller than 20 feet above the surrounding tree height require a detailed explanation of why a shorter installation is not feasible. The extra ten feet of height in this case avoids the need to construct additional towers in the area in the future. Designing the tower with an extra ten feet will promote site-sharing by multiple users, consistent with the 2008 Wireless Plan EA. This will benefit the environment by avoiding future disturbances and impacts from additional tower construction. Allowing co-location with other utility providers is also consistent with the 1996 Telecommunications Act.

The NPS evaluated the potential visual impacts of a 100-foot tower at the site using weather balloons and later with a crane. These efforts demonstrated that a 100-foot tower would not be visible from the nearby Lake Hotel, Fishing Bridge and Lake Lodge historic districts.

The public is invited to comment on the categorical exclusion and plan amendment. Specific design details for the proposed Lake WCF that were not available at the time the EA was prepared are available on the website listed below. Comments may be submitted at the Planning, Environment and Public Comment website <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/LakeCellularSite> and will be accepted through November 16, 2012. Comments will be reviewed by the NPS prior to approving a right-of-way permit for the facility.