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MAY 13 2013

Dr. Mark Baumler
Montana State Historic Preservation Office
1410 Eighth Avenue
Helena, Montana 59620

Subject: Initial Consultation – Northwestern Energy Electrical System Improvements
Environmental Assessment

Dear Dr. Baumler:

Northwestern Energy (NWE) proposes to improve electrical service and equipment in and near Yellowstone National Park. The proposal includes substation upgrades at seven locations in the park and a repeater location north of the park near Jardine, Montana. This is an undertaking with the potential to affect historic properties per 36 CFR 800 and we seek your review and comment during the scoping for this project. In addition to compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, the park will be completing an environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act, which will analyze impacts resulting from the proposal, including impacts to historic properties.

The proposal is designed to increase electrical reliability, reduce impacts to visitors and park operations resulting from outages, and improve safety for NWE personnel. The proposal would include construction of six buildings to house communication equipment, two of which would replace current smaller buildings. One sixty-foot high tower would be installed at each of the seven existing NWE power substation facilities and at one radio repeater located at Buffalo Mountain (2.65 miles southeast of Jardine, Montana) outside the park. Security fencing would be expanded and backup generator upgrades would be completed. A new communication system for NWE personnel would be designed and installed. Each building would be approximately sixteen feet by twenty four feet and be placed on a concrete slab. The towers would consist of a metal lattice structure approximately sixteen inches on a face and a maximum of sixty feet tall, depending on the site and near field obstructions. Towers would be painted a dull, dark finish to reduce visual impact concerns. The antenna on the towers would be VHF yagi and have twenty four-inch by thirty-inch elements. This system would be configured to allow for Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) and give the ability of a computerized control system in Butte, Montana, to remotely monitor and control electric operations in the park, thus reducing outage times.

Yellowstone National Park has determined that the area of potential effect (APE) for this project is the footprint of construction for the towers and equipment buildings (direct effects) and the area from which the towers can be reasonably viewed (indirect visual effects). The park will be conducting visual effects tests at each of the locations and will use that information to evaluate effects to historic properties. The park will also inventory and evaluate archeological and historical resources within the construction footprint APE. We have provided maps to show the locations of the proposed upgrades.

We look forward to any information or input you may have regarding this undertaking. We are currently scoping this project with the public, stakeholders, and tribes and will soon begin preparation of the EA. Once the EA is prepared we will consult regarding potential effects to historic properties. For more information on this project please contact Tobin Roop, Chief, Branch of Cultural Resources, at (307) 344-2224, or Jennifer Carpenter, Branch Chief, Environmental Quality & Science Coordination, at (307) 344-2528.

Sincerely,

Daniel N. Wenk
Superintendent

Enclosure – Maps of Proposed Improvement Locations

Identical Letters Sent With Enclosures to:

Mary Hopkins, Wyoming SHPO
Mark Baumler, Montana SHPO
Katry Harris, ACHP

bcc: (w/o enclosure)

Central Files
Supt's Files
Steve Iobst
David Hallac
Tobin Roop
Doug Madsen
Jennifer Carpenter
Elaine Hale
Staffan Peterson
Nancy Ward
Jim Knoelke
Bret DeYoung
YCR Files
No Reading Files

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