

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Alaska



Finding of No Significant Impact

**Right-of-Way Permit for Alaska Power and Telephone Electrical Service
Distribution Line to Slana, Alaska**

February 2005

Recommended:

J. E. W.
Superintendent, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve

02/25/05
Date

Approved:

Ralph H. Vinjey
Regional Director, Alaska

02/25/05
Date

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Right-of-Way Permit for Alaska Power and Telephone Electrical Service Distribution Line to Slana, Alaska

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Alaska February 2005

The National Park Service (NPS) prepared an environmental assessment (EA) to evaluate an action that would issue a right-of-way permit (ROW) to Alaska Power and Telephone (AP&T) for a utility easement on a proposed electrical distribution line in Slana, Alaska. Segments of the proposed electrical distribution line would affect acquired lands administered by Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST). AP&T would construct a diesel power-generation facility and overhead distribution system throughout the Slana area. The overhead distribution system would be on about 270 primary wood poles placed about 300 feet apart. Two primary poles would be situated on acquired NPS lands at mile 0.2 Nabesna Road. An additional three primary poles would be situated on acquired NPS lands at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road. There would be a thirty-foot wide ROW clearing beneath the primary distribution line; the poles would be placed about 70 to 80 feet from the Nabesna Road centerline within the existing state ROW. As requested by NPS, AP&T would provide underground service from the overhead distribution line to provide electrical service to NPS facilities at the Slana Ranger Station and residence, and acquired NPS administrative lands at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road.

The NPS has selected Alternative B (NPS preferred alternative), Grant a Right-Of-Way to Alaska Power and Telephone for an Electrical Distribution Line, with the mitigation measures. The alternative was not modified during the public comment period.

No changes were made to the EA and no public comments were received during the public comment period.

ALTERNATIVES

Two alternatives were evaluated in the EA.

Alternative A, No Action (Environmentally Preferred Alternative)

Under the no action alternative NPS would not grant a right-of-way permit to AP&T for an electrical distribution line traversing lands acquired by the NPS for administration of Wrangell St-Elias National Park and Preserve.

Alternative B, Grant a Right-Of-Way to Alaska Power and Telephone for an Electrical Distribution Line (NPS Preferred Alternative)

Under the preferred alternative, the NPS would grant a right-of-way to Alaska Power and Telephone for two segments of an electrical distribution line affecting lands acquired for administration of WRST.

The distribution line would cross the southern end of an NPS housing lot at mile 0.2 Nabesna Road paralleling the road for a distance of 412 feet. Two (2) wood poles with a forty-five foot height would be placed in excavated holes 6 feet deep and 2 feet wide. The distribution line would also cross three lots at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road previously donated to the NPS for a distance of 716 feet. Two or three poles would be situated in the road ROW at the acquired property at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road; the exact locations of the poles at the mile 1.9 Nabesna Road NPS property will be determined at a later date. In total, as many as five (5) poles would be situated on acquired NPS lands.

There would be a thirty-foot wide ROW clearing (15-foot centerline) beneath the primary distribution line; the poles would be placed about 70 to 80 feet from the Nabesna Road centerline within existing Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities ROW. AP&T would perform ROW clearing during initial development and, as needed, on a 5-year cycle to enable service trucks to drive the line for maintenance. There would be no disturbance of areas covered by low ground cover. ROW clearing methods would depend on the type and growth of vegetation, and may include: hand-cutting of willows and alder, removal of larger trees at ground level using chain saws, and use of Hydro-Ax to clear continuous growth to about 6 inches above ground level

At the request of the NPS, AP&T would provide underground service from the overhead distribution line to provide electrical service to NPS facilities; the Slana Ranger Station, ranger residence, and acquired lands at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road. The NPS would pay the difference between overhead and underground services to NPS lands. Approximately 500 linear feet of trenching would be required on acquired NPS lands for underground electrical service. All underground electrical services on acquired NPS lands would have a minimum 36-inch burial depth. Two three-phase pad mount transformers would be required on NPS acquired lands. One transformer would be situated on the ranger station property, and the other transformer would be situated on the NPS property at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road. Each pad mount transformer basement would be buried in an excavation four (4) feet wide, four (4) feet long, and three (3) feet deep.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was released for public review and comment from January 20 to February 20, 2005. The EA was posted on the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) public website. The EA was also sent by email to the Alaska Department of Natural Resources for coordinated review by the State of Alaska. The park issued a press release announcing the availability of the EA and the public comment period on January 14, 2005. The news release was aired by radio stations in Valdez and Glennallen, Alaska, during the public comment period.

No written comments were received from any government agency, tribal entity, interest group, or individual.

The NPS believes that the conclusions in the EA regarding the environmental effects of the proposed action support its decision to issue this finding of no significant impact.

DECISION

The NPS decision is to select Alternative B, Grant a Right-Of-Way to Alaska Power and Telephone for an Electrical Distribution Line (NPS Preferred Alternative) along with the mitigating measures. No modifications of Alternative B were made during or after the public comment period.

Mitigating Measures

The following mitigation measures apply to the selected Alternative B, Grant a Right-Of-Way to Alaska Power and Telephone for an Electrical Distribution Line (NPS Preferred Alternative).

Wildlife:

- Guidelines for raptor protection would be based on Rural Utility Service and National Safety Code Requirements. In addition guidelines from the Edison Electric Institute (EEI) publication "Mitigating Bird Collisions with Powerlines: The State of the Art in 1994" and from EEI's "Suggested Practices for Raptor Protection on Power Lines: The State of the Art in 1996" will be followed to reduce the potential for impacts to avian species from the project.

Cultural Resources:

- An archeologist shall be present onsite to monitor all surface-disturbing activity associated with this project including excavations, vegetative clearing, and trenching.
- The locations of the proposed power pole placements in the vicinity of the ranger station and ranger residence at mile 0.2 Nabesna Road have been surveyed for cultural resources by park archaeologists. If previously unidentified archaeological features are encountered during construction, work will cease immediately to ensure protection of cultural resources, and the park superintendent will be notified. Construction will resume only after protection of cultural resources is assured.
- No surveys for cultural resources have been conducted to date at the locations of the proposed trenching for electrical service to park facilities on NPS acquired lands, or of the locations of the proposed power pole placements on NPS acquired lands at mile 1.9 Nabesna Road. Surveys of cultural resources will be performed prior to any surface disturbance specific to this aspect of project construction. If these surveys identify the presence of cultural resources, an assessment of resource significance will be conducted. Once the surveys are conducted, and if previously unidentified cultural resources are encountered during construction, work will cease immediately to ensure protection of

cultural resources, and the park superintendent will be notified. Construction will resume only after protection of cultural resources is assured.

- All historical and archaeological documentation will be carried out by or under direct supervision of a person or persons meeting at a minimum the Professional Qualifications Standards listed in the Secretary of the Interior Standards and Guidelines (48 CFR 44716-44742, September 29, 1983).

Rationale for the Decision

The selected alternative will satisfy the purpose and need of the project better than the no action alternative because it provides centralized electrical service to the rural community of Slana, Alaska. Slana is the only community on a major highway in the state without commercial electrical service.

The no action alternative (environmentally preferred alternative) was rejected because the logistics of relying on self-generated power at the Slana Ranger Station would continue to constrain park operations in the Nabesna District. During peak operating season, the NPS generator has to remain in operation 24 hours a day. As in the past, NPS would have to continue to scale down maintenance, research, and interpretation projects dependent on electrical service; park administration would continue subject to the constraints of limited electricity.

Significance Criteria

The preferred alternative does not conflict with any of the following significance criteria (40 CFR Section 1508.27). Therefore, the preferred alternative will not have a significant effect on the human environment.

(1) Impacts that may be both beneficial and adverse. A significant effect may exist even if the Federal agency believes that on balance the effect will be beneficial. The EA evaluated the effects of the preferred alternative on vegetation, wildlife, park administration, and cultural resources. There would be minor long-term localized adverse effects on vegetation and wildlife; minor long-term beneficial impacts on park administration; and no known cultural resources would be affected.

(2) The degree to which the proposed action affects public health or safety. The proposed action would not affect public health or safety to any known or appreciable degree either adversely or beneficially.

(3) Unique characteristics of the geographic area such as proximity to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetland, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas. The resources affected by the proposed action are on acquired lands not within the authorized boundary of the park and preserve. No known historic resources, cultural resources, park lands, prime farmlands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas would be affected.

(4) *The degree to which effects on the quality of the human environment are likely to be highly controversial.* The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. No written public comments were received during the 30-day public comment period.

(5) *The degree to which the possible effects on the human environment are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.* The degree or possibility that the effects on the human environment would be highly uncertain or would involve unique or unknown risks is extremely remote.

(6) *The degree to which the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about a future consideration.* The degree or possibility that the action may establish a precedent of future actions with significant effects or represents a decision in principle about future considerations is extremely remote.

(7) *Whether the action is related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts. Significance exists if it is reasonable to anticipate a cumulatively significant impact on the environment. Significance cannot be avoided by terming an action temporary or by breaking it down into small component parts.* The action would provide a centralized source of electrical power to the project area versus continued reliance on self-generated power. The action is not related to other actions of individual insignificance that would amount to cumulatively significant impacts on the environment.

(8) *Degree to which the action may adversely affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or may cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources.* There are no features in the project area listed in the National Register of Historic Places. There are no known features in the project area eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The degree or possibility that the action may cause loss or destruction of known scientific, cultural, or historic resources is extremely remote.

(9) *The degree to which the action may adversely affect an endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species Act of 1973.* Threatened or endangered species, and their critical habitat, were eliminated from further consideration in the EA because they are not present in the project area or would not be affected on adjacent lands by project implementation.

(10) *Whether the action threatens a violation of Federal, State, or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment.* The action would not cause a violation of any Federal, State, or local law or requirements for environmental protection.

FINDINGS

The levels of adverse impacts to park resources anticipated from the selected alternative will not result in an impairment of park resources that fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or that are key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park.

Specifically, the selected alternative affects acquired lands necessary for administration of WRST and does not affect lands within the WRST boundary.

The selected alternative complies with the Endangered Species Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, and Executive Orders 11988 and 11990 for floodplains and wetlands. There will be no restriction of subsistence activities as documented by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, Title VIII, Section 810(a) Summary Evaluation and Findings.

The NPS has determined that the selected alternative does not constitute a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment. Therefore, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 and regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality (40 CFR 1508.9), an environmental impact statement is not needed and will not be prepared for this project.