

U. S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Reclamation

Mid-Pacific Region
Lahontan Basin Area Office
Carson City, Nevada

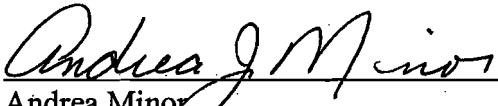
Finding of No Significant Impact
and
Environmental Assessment

Patua Bypass Road
Churchill County, Nevada

January 2009

FONSI NO. LO-09-03


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FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

Patua Bypass Road

I. Background, Proposed Action, and Purpose and Need

Vulcan Power Company (Vulcan) is requesting authorization to construct a 1500-foot bypass road in Township 20 North, Range 26 East, Section 28, Mount Diablo Meridian (MDM), northwest of Hazen, NV. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has issued geothermal leases to Vulcan on 15 square miles of federal land in the Hazen area, held in a checkerboard pattern with private holdings. Reclamation has surface management authority over six of these sections. The proposed bypass road would allow Vulcan to explore the potential for the geothermal resources in privately held portions of the Hazen-Patua lease area. Vulcan has used existing access roads through private and Reclamation lands to reach these private holdings, but cannot use the portion of this road to bring in heavy equipment.

Under the Proposed Action, Reclamation would allow the construction of a bypass road to allow access for large trucks and heavy equipment to the Vulcan Hazen-Patua lease area. The new right-of-way would be parallel to an existing Kinder Morgan right-of-way. The bypass road would be constructed to Bureau of Land Management road standards in Road Design Manual 9113. Reclamation would not conduct an engineering review of the project but would authorize construction across Reclamation withdrawn lands.

Under the No Action Alternative, Reclamation would not provide concurrence to allow a bypass road, and Vulcan would have to find an alternative route for large trucks and other heavy equipment to access their private holdings. Vulcan has at least two alternative options for accessing its existing pads.

The purpose of the proposed action is to allow better access to Vulcan's privately held leased areas in adjacent lands. The need for the proposed action is to meet the requirements of Executive Order (EO) 13212 and the Energy Policy Act of 2005. EO 13212 directs executive departments and agencies to "take appropriate actions, to the extent consistent with applicable law, to expedite projects that will increase the production, transmission, or conservation of energy." The Energy Policy Act of 2005 amends the Geothermal Steam Act of 1970 to facilitate development of new geothermal resources in an environmentally responsible manner to help meet the increasing interest in geothermal energy development on public lands in the western US.

II. Summary of Impacts

Direct Impacts:

Because both alternatives involve some level of construction activities, direct impacts would be similar to affected resources; however scale may be different due to the varying levels of construction required.

Wildlife: The present wildlife that occupies the project area would be displaced during construction of the bypass road. There would be loss of habitat due to road construction and mortality due to vehicle collisions.

Threatened and Endangered Species: No impact because none are present in, or immediately adjacent to, the project area.

Water Resources

Surface Water: There is potential for erosion and spills to impact surface water via runoff from the construction sites.

Ground water: No impacts

Air quality: There would be temporary impacts associated with the construction activities.

Noise: Construction of the bypass road and alternative new access roads would result in a temporary increase in noise levels in the immediate vicinity of the construction sites.

Vegetation: There would be permanent removal of vegetation for the new road, there would be impacts to adjacent vegetation from fugitive dust, and there is the possibility of noxious weeds invading the site.

Hazardous Material: There would be the possibility of spills of common hazardous materials used in construction.

Visual Resources: There would be minimal impacts to visual resources due to the remote location and presence of existing roads and trails.

Transportation: Implementation of either alternative would temporarily increase vehicular traffic from Highway 50 Alt to the Hazen-Patua lease area.

Historic & Cultural Resources: No impacts

Indian Trust Assets: No impacts

Environmental Justice: No impacts

Indirect Impacts:

Indirect impacts are similar between the two alternatives because of the resultant pad construction and drilling activity. There will be indirect impacts from drilling the well pads and from the traffic from drill rigs and large trucks along the road. These impacts would be to the same resources mentioned above having direct effects.

Cumulative impacts:

A reasonably foreseeable development scenario would involve the drilling and testing of additional exploratory wells to determine the capacity of the resource in the lease area. If the resource proves to be sufficient for power generation, Vulcan would develop additional well pads, pipelines, one or more power plants, and transmission lines to deliver electricity to the grid.

The possible increased development would impact vegetation due to direct removal of plants and the incremental reduction in continuity in the native vegetation, allowing for increased weeds and reduced resilience to disturbance. Wildlife would be affected by the direct loss of habitat, as well as by habitat fragmentation and road mortality.

This long term development plan would increase the impacts from noise and to transportation on the adjacent paved roads. The increased development would also impact visual resources. There would also be the likelihood of soil erosion and chemical spills, which would increase the possibility of impacts to water resources.

III. Comments Received on the EA

No public comments were received on the EA.

IV. Findings

Reclamation prepared an environmental assessment on the impacts of providing concurrence to Vulcan for construction of this bypass road. The EA documents that compliance has occurred with the Endangered Species Act, Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, Indian Trust Assets, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Environmental Justice, Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Lahontan Basin Area Office has found that the proposed action is not a major federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required for carrying out this action.

Following are the reasons why the impacts of the proposed action are not significant:

1. There would be short-term, temporary impacts during actual construction to the following resources: Air Quality, Noise, Visual Resources, and Land Use/Transportation/Access.
2. Use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) will reduce the likelihood of impacts to surface water resources and air quality and reduce the possibility of hazardous materials spills. Use of construction BMPs will reduce the impacts to vegetation and reduce the likelihood of an invasion of weeds, as well as reduce destruction of wildlife habitat.
3. There will be no impact to Threatened or Endangered Species, Indian Trust Assets, or

historic or cultural resources.

4. Implementing the proposed action will not disproportionately affect minorities or low-income populations and communities.

5. There are no irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources.