



Bureau of Land Management Environmental Impact Statement key points on Greater Echanis wind projects

The BLM's EIS provides an independent, government sponsored, scientific examination of the Greater Echanis wind projects and related transmission line. This EIS confirms the planning and three years of studies that underpin the development. The project not only complies with all environmental laws and safeguards, but that it also uses best practices to reduce impacts wherever possible.

*Below is a collection of language pulled directly from the EIS covering some of the most important aspects of the project, with quotes from Draft EIS included in **bold type**.*

EIS Scope

The EIS evaluates different aspects of the project for both potential environmental, indirect effects and cumulative impacts. The findings of the EIS provide a complete, independent study examining all potential effects from each possible alternative action (including no action).

Executive Summary:

"Because development of the Echanis Project is dependent upon Federal approval of the ROW grant for the transmission line, **the Echanis Project qualifies as a "connected non-Federal action"** under 40 CFR 1508.7 and 40 CFR 1508.25(a). Therefore, **this Draft EIS must analyze the potential environmental effects associated with development and operation of the Echanis Project as "indirect effects" associated with the North Steens 230-kV Transmission Line Project, as well as cumulative impacts from the reasonably foreseeable future actions.** While this environmental review requires disclosure of potential effects on private lands, as a connection, BLM and USFWS only have authority to approve, modify, or deny ROW grants for those actions occurring on public lands."

Highlights of the North Steens 230-kV Transmission Line Project Draft EIS

The Draft EIS examines three main options for a 150-foot wide transmission line easement:

- Alternative A: No action;
- Alternative B: West Route, "Proposed Action," crosses
 - 18.7 miles of private land,
 - 8.85 miles of BLM lands (outside Steens Wilderness and other restricted areas) and
 - 1.32 miles of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.;
- Alternative C: North Route, crosses

- 33.66 miles of private land,
- 12.1 miles of BLM land (outside Steens Wilderness and other restricted areas) and
- no portion in the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Visual impacts

Using 87 key Observation Points (KOPs), the BLM tested a variety of locations, and the only two points that will experience either a moderate or high level of change are on county-owned gravel roads outside the wilderness area. Based on the findings below, the projects—all sited on private land—will be visible from only a tiny fraction of Steens Wilderness Areas.

Number of acres of Steens Wilderness with views of:

- The Echanis Project: 668 acres or 0.4% of the Wilderness;
- The East Ridge Project: 4,740.9 acres or 2.8% of the Wilderness;
- The West Ridge Project: 2,294 acres or 1.3% of the Wilderness;
- Riddle Mountain Project: N/A.

(Table 3.19-5)

Methodology:

Section 3.9 “Visual Resources” assesses the visual impacts of the transmission line and the wind projects. **“Over the past 30 years, the BLM has developed, refined, and implemented visual analysis and managements systems that provide a tool for assessing visual qualities of the landscape in objective terms. Visual assessment of the landscape using these tools establishes identifiable, consistent qualities that can be described and measured.”** (3.9.1) BLM methodology was used throughout the Draft EIS on the portions of the transmission line on both public and private lands, as well as on the wind project, which is on private land. **“While BLM methodology does not apply to non-Federal lands, the VRM methodology was used – for consistency – to assess potential visual effects for the entire Project Area and its alternatives.”** (3.9.1)

Key Observation Points:

Visual Resources, Appendix D. There is a 121 page Visual Resource analysis at the end of the Draft EIS. **“About 87 points were initially identified in the field as potential KOPs (“Key Observation Points”). Of these, 35 KOPS were selected for study to analyze the Project’s direct, indirect and cumulative effects.”** (Appendix D, 1.1.3.2, page D-7)

Section 3.9, Visual Resources, analyzes impacts from numerous ‘Key Observation Points’ (KOP).

Table 3.9-7 notes the following for impacts from the Echanis wind turbines:

- **“High level of change”** for one KOP located on East Steens Road (the county gravel road around the east side of the mountain, outside the Wilderness);
- **“Moderate level of change”** for two KOPs on the same county road, outside of the Wilderness;

- **“Low level of effect”** for East Steens Loop (Kiger Gorge viewpoint) and East Rim Overlook, the two key points within the Steens Wilderness from which the Echanis project is visible.

Visual effects from the transmission line via:

- Proposed action (west route): **“Low effect”** for all KOPs
- Alternative C (north route): **“Low effect”** for all KOPs.

Cumulative Effects

The EIS examines the total cumulative effects of both permitted and reasonably foreseeable actions. In addition to specific visual and right-of-way impacts, the EIS examines other effects of the project including environmental, socioeconomic, noise, air quality and energy. The findings confirm that these projects will create clean, renewable power, jobs and economic stimulus with minimal overall environmental impact.

Scope of potential impacts:

Section 3.19. **“Cumulative effects are the effects on the environment which result from the incremental impact of the Proposed Action and Action Alternatives when added to the other past, present and reasonably foreseeable future actions, regardless of what agency (federal or non-federal) or person undertakes such other actions.”** (3.19) Reasonably foreseeable future actions weighed in the Draft EIS include:

- The West Ridge Wind Project, under development by CEP;
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- Riddle Mountain Wind Farm, under development by CEP;
- Five Creeks Rangeland Restoration, a BLM project;
- The Steens Mountain Travel Management Plan, a BLM project;
- North Steens Ecosystem Restoration Project, a BLM project;
- Jackass Butte Wind Energy Testing and Monitoring Site, by another wind developer;
- Harney Electric Cooperative 115-kV line upgrade, part of the CEP wind projects.

Socioeconomic Employment Effects:

- Jobs: four CEP wind projects = 40 direct permanent jobs, 20 “induced” jobs (Table 3.19-2)
- Income effects: transmission line = \$13,690,000-\$18,090,000 (present value) (Table 3.19-3)
- Wind projects: total (direct & induced) = \$94,520,000 (Table 3.19-3)
- Effects on Wild Horses & Burros: “Construction, operation and maintenance of the transmission line would not affect the long term viability or management of the horse herds ... because the transmission line would not be located in areas frequented by wild horses.” (3.19.2.12)

Air quality:

(Describing the “No Action” alternative) **“The proposed wind farm would have had an average annual generating capacity of approximately 463,000 megawatt hours which might otherwise cause to be emitted elsewhere about 194,000 metric tons of CO2 equivalents annually from mixed generating resources serving the Northwest region.”** (3.16.3.1) Footnotes indicate this is the annual offset for the

Echanis Project only. Under cumulative scenario, with four CEP projects, the annual reduction in CO2 would be approximately 776,000 tons per year.

Energy:

“Combined, the four wind energy projects and the HEC 115 kV Upgrade will contribute approximately 416 megawatts of wind energy production, which would provide enough power for approximately 124,000 homes annually.” (3.19.2.18)

Noise:

“The noise effects resulting from the operation of the transmission line and wind turbines would be minor or not noticeable given the spatial distances between the Project Area and noise sensitive receptors.” (3.19.2.17)