

Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Tom McClintock, Chairman
Hearing Memorandum

April 3, 2017

To: All Subcommittee on Federal Lands Members

From: Majority Committee Staff – Aniela Butler
Subcommittee on Federal Lands (x 6-7736)

Hearing: Legislative hearing on **H.R. 1728 (Rep. Mike Simpson)**, To modify the boundaries of the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area, and for other purposes.
April 5, 2017 at 2:00 PM; 1324 Longworth HOB.

Bill Summary

H.R. 1728, introduced by Representative Mike Simpson (R-ID-02), removes 2,600 acres from the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA) in exchange for 4,800 new acres of NCA and mitigation funding to facilitate the completion of two segments of the Gateway West Transmission Line in Idaho.

Cosponsors

Rep. Raul Labrador (R-ID-01)

Invited Witnesses

Panel I

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Member of Congress, Idaho's 2nd District

Background

In 2007, Rocky Mountain Power and Idaho Power began jointly developing the Gateway West Transmission Line, a project creating 1,000 miles of new high-voltage transmission lines between Glenrock, Wyoming and Melba, Idaho.¹ As the existing electricity infrastructure ages across the West, new transmission lines must fill in the grid to provide fast, reliable energy to consumers, even during peak periods of use. After its estimated completion in 2024, the new Gateway West Transmission Line will deliver larger quantities of reliable electricity to consumers and increase available energy from renewable resources.² Over the projected six and

¹ Gateway West, “The Gateway West Transmission Line Project – Project History”, <http://www.gatewaywestproject.com/history.aspx>.

² Ibid.

a half years of construction, Rocky Mountain Power and Idaho Power estimate the project will result in 1,200 new jobs and \$3.5 billion in private investment.

Currently, Rocky Mountain Power and Idaho Power are working with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to conduct National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) reviews on proposed segments of the transmission line. On January 19, 2017, the BLM released a Record of Decision (ROD) on Segments 8 and 9 of Gateway West, selecting Alternative 5 as the proposed route for the transmission line.³ While Alternative 5 diverted the transmission line to avoid portions of the Birds of Prey NCA, the proposed route also crossed through important sage grouse habitat, private property, and significantly increased costs for the ratepayers. After the release of the ROD, a coalition including Idaho Power and the Conservation Lands Foundation began meeting to discuss potential compromises to allow the transmission line to follow an alternative route.



4

H.R. 1728 reflects the compromise reached between the stakeholders to allow the project to move forward along the alternative route. H.R. 1728 removes 2,600 acres from the NCA and directs the BLM to issue a right of way through the tract for a transmission line. This new path mirrors the route originally recommended by BLM’s Resource Advisory Committee and

³ Bureau of Land Management, “Gateway West Transmission Project and Resource Management Plan Amendments Segments 8 and 9”, https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/39829/95570/115576/GWW_Segments_8_and_9_FINAL_ROD_without_appendices.pdf.

⁴ Map courtesy of Gateway West Project, http://www.gatewaywestproject.com/images/2017_0120_GW_ProjectOverviewMap.jpg.

supported by the state of Idaho during the NEPA evaluations. In exchange, the BLM will convert 4,800 acres of current multiple-use land into the NCA and receive \$8.5 million in mitigation funding from Idaho Power. In addition, Idaho Power will pay \$2,000, or approximately \$5 million total, for every acre of transmission line built in Segments 8 and 9 to the BLM Foundation to go towards enhancing the BLM's Conservation Lands System, particularly in Idaho. The bill also withdraws one area from future wind energy development after a wind project was cancelled due to its potential impact on golden eagle habitat. After the exchanges, the transmission line will follow the alternative route without falling on designated NCA land or intersecting any portion of critical sage grouse habitat or private property.

The entire Idaho delegation supports the bill along with the Conservation Lands Foundation, Idaho Conservation League, Idaho Power/Rocky Mountain Power, The Nature Conservancy, and The Wilderness Society.

Administration Position

The Administration position is unknown at this time.

Cost

A Congressional Budget Office cost estimate has not yet been completed for this bill.