

National Telecommunications and Information Administration
Broadband Technology Opportunities Program
Finding of No Significant Impact
New Mexico Department of Information Technology
Digital Statewide Interoperable Radio Communication
Internet Transport System (SIRCITS) Middle Mile Project

Summary

The New Mexico Department of Information Technology (NM DoIT) applied to the Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) for a grant to complete upgrades and service enhancements to New Mexico's 626-mile Statewide Interoperable Radio Communications Internet Transport System (SIRCITS). Legacy analog equipment at 59 existing public safety system sites will be upgraded or replaced with high-capacity broadband digital telecommunications equipment. Replacement towers will be erected at 29 of these sites, some of which will also require new communications and/or generator shelters. This upgrade will expand the capacity of the network and create a middle mile backbone that can be used to backhaul broadband traffic throughout the State, including in remote, hard-to-access areas. Grant funds will also be used to establish a 4G 700 MHz long-term evolution (LTE) wireless mobile communications system in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. A total of 13 sites in Albuquerque and Santa Fe will be equipped with 700 MHz radios, antennas, and related network equipment needed to provide mobile 4G wireless communications. This component of the SIRCITS will enable mobile broadband interoperability between state, county, and local public safety entities. In total, work is planned at 70 separate telecommunications sites, including 59 existing tower sites and 11 new mobile wireless telecommunication sites. The effort to implement microwave upgrades and establish a wireless 4G network throughout the state is referred to as the Digital SIRCITS Middle Mile Project (Project).

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) awarded a grant for the Project to NM DoIT through BTOP, as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). The funding must be obligated and the Project completed within three years. This timeline will comply with the laws and regulations governing the use of this ARRA grant funding.

BTOP supports the deployment of broadband infrastructure in unserved and underserved areas of the United States and its Territories. As a condition of receiving BTOP grant funding, recipients must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA). Specifically, NEPA limits the types of actions that the grantee can initiate prior to completing required environmental reviews. Some actions may be categorically excluded from further NEPA analyses based on the specific types and scope of work to be conducted. For projects that are not categorically excluded from further environmental review, the grant recipient must prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) that meets the requirements of NEPA. After a sufficiency review, NTIA may adopt the EA, use it as the basis for finding that the project will not have a significant impact on the environment, and issue a finding of no significant impact (FONSI). Following such a finding, the BTOP grant recipient may then begin

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construction or other activities identified in the EA as the preferred alternative, in accordance with any special protocols or identified environmental protection measures.

NM DoIT completed an EA for this Project in November 2011. NTIA reviewed the EA, determined it is sufficient, and adopted it as part of the development of this FONSI.

The Project includes:

- Upgrading or replacing existing analog equipment with digital telecommunications equipment at 59 existing tower sites throughout New Mexico;
- Replacing towers at 29 of the 59 existing tower sites;
- Installing one new digital microwave antennas at 47 existing tower sites;
- Installing one new digital microwave radios at 48 existing tower sites;
- Installing a communications shelter at 25 existing sites
- Installing a generator shelter at 28 existing sites;
- Installing emergency backup power systems at 34 existing sites;
- Installing heating, ventilating, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems at two sites;
- Establishing 11 new mobile wireless telecommunication sites at existing industrial and commercial facilities; and
- Installing mobile wireless equipment (e.g., 700 MHz radios and antennas) at 2 of the 59 existing tower sites and 11 new telecommunications sites in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

Based on a review of the analysis in the EA, NTIA has determined that the Project, implemented in accordance with the preferred alternative and signed Programmatic Agreement (PA), and incorporating best management practices (BMPs) and protective measures identified in the EA, will not result in any significant environmental impacts. Therefore, the preparation of an EIS is not required. The basis for this determination is described in this FONSI.

Additional information and copies of the Executive Summary of the EA and FONSI are available to all interested persons and the public through the BTOP website (www2.ntia.doc.gov/) and the following contact:

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New Mexico Department of Information Technology
Digital SIRCITS Middle Mile Project FONSI

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Purpose and Need

The purpose of this Project is to implement a middle mile high capacity, digital, microwave system that takes advantage of existing, strategically-placed, legacy communications infrastructure in the State of New Mexico. The existing analog network does not have the capacity to carry much communications traffic and cannot currently support broadband communications. Digital microwave upgrades to the existing tower network will provide additional capacity sufficient to enable enhanced communications capabilities for critical public safety functions and coordination. In addition, the upgraded tower network will provide enhanced broadband access to the 174 community anchor institutions (CAIs) that are currently connected to analog portions of the network. It is anticipated that these CAIs will be able to use the upgraded network for tele-health, video conferencing, and data applications. The upgraded network will also serve as the foundation for future delivery of high-speed broadband access to residents and other users in sparsely populated, remote areas and Tribal lands that do not presently have equitable access opportunities. Less than 40% of New Mexicans subscribe to broadband communications services, and nearly 20% do not have access to such services at all.

A second, complementary purpose of this Project is to implement a last mile 700 MHz LTE wireless mobile communications system in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Public safety personnel in these two cities currently utilize outdated “push-to-talk” wireless technology. By providing regional infrastructure and “smart” mobile 4G handsets, this component of the Project will increase the scope and quality of communications capabilities among state, county, and local public safety entities, including emergency medical services.

Project Description

Under this Project, work will be conducted at 59 existing telecommunications sites and 11 previously developed facilities. The specific scope of work to be performed at each site varies, depending on current conditions and equipment to be upgraded. Legacy analog equipment will be upgraded or replaced with high-capacity, broadband, digital telecommunications equipment at 59 existing SIRCITS sites. According to the Project plans, NM DoIT will install a new digital microwave antenna at 47 of these existing sites, and a new digital microwave radio at 48 of these sites. Replacement towers will also be erected at 29 of the existing SIRCITS sites. To support network operations, a new communications shelter will be erected at 25 existing sites. In addition, a new generator shelter will be erected at 25 existing sites. Emergency backup power systems will be installed at 34 sites, and HVAC systems will be installed at two sites. The EA includes two tables that specify planned installation, construction, and replacement activity at each of the 59 existing SIRCITS sites.

Replacement towers will be limited to no more than 59.7 meters tall. Tower and shelter construction will require the use of standard construction equipment and will involve some ground disturbance within existing site footprints. Replacement towers will be placed in close

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proximity to the existing towers. The old towers and any other equipment or structures on the existing site that are to be displaced will be dismantled and removed from the SIRCITS sites after new installation is complete. Old equipment will be disposed in accordance with best industry practices.

In addition to microwave components of the Project, 13 existing sites will be equipped to provide 700 MHz LTE mobile wireless communications in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. These sites require only the installation of new antennas and cables on existing towers or other elevated structures, and addition of 700 MHz base stations, networking equipment, and local carrier connections in existing communications shelters. Two of the 13 mobile wireless sites will be collocated with existing microwave sites at the Radio Communication Bureau buildings in Albuquerque and Santa Fe. Under the Project, NM DoIT is also planning to replace the tower at these two sites. The remaining 11 new mobile wireless sites will be established at existing facilities with infrastructure capable of supporting the new equipment. No new towers, shelters, buildings, or generators will be required to complete the mobile wireless component of this Project.

Work associated with upgrading and retrofitting legacy analog components of the SIRCITS network will primarily occur at sites outside urban areas, although some work will be required near residences, urban environments, and within U.S. Forest Service (USFS) lands. Work to be performed in establishing mobile 4G wireless networks in Albuquerque and Santa Fe will be limited to urban areas. All work related to the Project will be performed in accordance with BMPs and applicable environmental standards.

Alternatives

The EA includes an analysis of the alternatives for implementing the Project to meet the purpose and need. NTIA also requires that an EA include a discussion of the no action alternative. The following summarizes the alternatives analyzed in the EA.

Alternative 1 – Upgrade Existing Statewide Tower Network and Establish Regional Mobile Wireless Network (Preferred Alternative). This alternative involves upgrading and retrofitting 59 digital microwave SIRCITS sites throughout New Mexico and establishing a new mobile 4G wireless system in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The alternative will include erecting 29 replacement towers and installing digital microwave antennas and radios, communications and generator shelters, and emergency backup power and HVAC systems, as needed based on current infrastructure and site conditions. This alternative will also include attaching new 700 MHz antennas and cables on existing towers or other elevated structures, and placing related base stations, networking equipment, and local carrier connections in existing communications shelters. No new towers, shelters, buildings, or generators will be installed as part of the mobile wireless component of this Project.

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No Action Alternative. No action was also considered. This alternative represents conditions as they currently exist in the Project area. Under the no action alternative, the public safety system in New Mexico would continue to rely on obsolete analog technology that is insufficient to allow optimal communication among state, county, and local public safety entities and emergency medical services. Moreover, the current middle mile network cannot accommodate the additional traffic capacity that would be necessary to connect unserved and underserved users in rural, often remote and sparsely populated areas of the state. In addition, public safety personnel in Albuquerque and Santa Fe would remain limited by the existing wireless network with relatively antiquated “push to talk” mobile technology. The EA examined this alternative as the baseline for evaluating impacts relative to other alternatives being considered.

Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward. Although other options were considered, NM DoIT was not able to identify viable alternatives that might meet the stated purpose and need for the Project. With regard to the digital microwave portion of the Project, there is no alternative technology (e.g., buried or aerial fiber) that would accomplish the goal of upgrading the existing network. Furthermore, although a new fiber-based network could be deployed, implementing such an alternative along the 626-mile route covered by the existing network would incur far greater cost and involve substantially more disruption than upgrading the existing SIRCITS tower network. Additionally, separate agreements with a very large number of landowners would be required to secure rights of way and leases to accommodate the deployment of an aerial or buried cable network. These problematic technical and administrative requirements could cause the Project to exceed the time allowed under the BTOP program to complete implementation of the grant. Similarly, there is no viable alternative for deployment of the 700 MHz mobile wireless component of the Project. In granting NM DoIT permission to build this public safety network, the Federal Communications Commission required that LTE technology be used. Accordingly, these options were eliminated from detailed analysis in the EA.

Findings and Conclusions

The EA analyzed existing conditions and environmental consequences of the preferred alternative and the no action alternative in 11 major resource areas, including Noise, Air Quality, Geology and Soils, Water Resources, Biological Resources, Historic and Cultural Resources, Aesthetic and Visual Resources, Land Use and Recreation, Infrastructure, Socioeconomic Resources, and Human Health and Safety. Cumulative impacts were also evaluated.

Noise

This Project will have short-term impacts on noise in the immediate vicinity of sites requiring construction of replacement towers or communications and generator shelters. This noise will be generated by heavy machinery and, therefore, will be limited to the construction phase of the Project. Use of the new and upgraded wireless networks for data transmission will not alter ambient noise in the long-term. Moreover, although emergency backup power generators and

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HVAC systems will be installed, the EA indicates that these units will simply replace existing infrastructure. Accordingly, noise levels are expected to quickly return to pre-existing conditions once construction is complete. Based on these assessments, no significant noise impacts are expected to occur as a result of this Project.

Air Quality

Air quality at all 70 Project sites, including those in urban areas, was found to be within acceptable ranges. Operation of heavy equipment and vehicles during the construction phase will result in short-term, minor emissions of air pollutants, including greenhouse gases (GHG). Considering the nature and scope of the installation, NM DoIT estimates that Project-related GHG emissions will range from approximately 0.41 to 1.62 metric tons. Even with construction planned for 34 sites, GHG emissions from this Project will be well below the Council on Environmental Quality's presumptive effects threshold of 25,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions from an action. Long-term operation of the network for data transmission will not result in ongoing air emissions, other than those associated with infrequent and short-term operation of the emergency backup power generators already in place. Based on these assessments, no significant impacts on air quality are expected.

Geology and Soils

Project activity at 36 of the 70 sites will not result in any ground disturbance. Consequently, there will be no effect on geology and soil in these locations. For the 34 sites where construction, such as the installation of replacement towers, communications shelters, or generator shelters is planned, there may be minor, short-term effects on geology and soil. However, ground disturbance will be limited to disturbed soils within the footprint of existing SIRCITS sites. Based on these assessments, no significant impacts on geology and soils are expected to occur as a result of this Project.

Water Resources

Project sites are typically located in arid locations with very limited potential for affecting water resources. No perennial surface water features, ephemeral arroyos/drainages, or wetlands are found within, or in the immediate vicinity of, the 70 Project sites. Although New Mexico is underlain by several deep and perched aquifers, Project sites are not located within drainage systems, depression areas (that could serve as groundwater recharge zones), or areas designated as floodplains. Finally, New Mexico has no coastal zones. Nevertheless, NM DoIT will require its contractors to observe applicable BMPs during all phases of Project implementation. NM DoIT will focus on preventing spills. In the event that any spills do occur, NM DoIT will promptly report and clean them up. No hazardous materials will be disposed at Project sites. Based on this analysis, the Project will have no significant adverse impacts on water resources.

Biological Resources

Site surveys were conducted at the planned microwave and mobile 4G wireless sites between March and May 2011 to evaluate potential impacts on threatened or endangered species,

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wetlands/waterways, migratory birds, and other biological resources. Visual surveys of adjacent areas were also conducted to evaluate the presence of suitable habitat for state and federally listed species. The surveys also included an evaluation of the existing vegetation, as well as the identification of any noxious weeds that may be present.

Biological resources are not expected to be significantly impacted by the Project as planned. However, the biological assessments determined that the Benson Ridge, Cathey Ridge, Buck Mountain, Capilla Peak, and La Mosca sites are located within critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*). In addition, the Sandia Crest, Socorro Forestry, and Socorro State Police sites are located near, but not within, designated critical habitat for the Mexican spotted owl or the southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*). Based on the planned scope of work, NM DoIT concluded that the Project is “expected to have no effects on the southwestern willow flycatcher,” and “may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect the Mexican spotted owl.” The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) New Mexico Ecological Services Field Office concurred with this conclusion in a letter dated June 22, 2011, that stated in part, “we find that your proposed action will have insignificant and discountable effects to the Mexican spotted owl.” Nevertheless, to protect the Mexican spotted owl, the USFWS also recommended that Project construction be conducted between September 1 and March 1. Construction may begin earlier in the summer (early to mid-July), provided that NM DoIT maintain close coordination with USFWS biologists.

In addition, sensitive resources were evaluated with regard to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, as discussed in correspondence from the USFWS dated December 23, 2010. The common raven (*Corvus corax*) was found to be present at the Cedro Peak site. To protect this species, additional consultation with USFWS will be required if Project activity is scheduled to occur in this location during the nesting period from March through August. In addition, efforts were made to design the sites in a manner least likely to harm migratory birds that may traverse the area (i.e., keeping the tower heights below 59.7 meters, avoiding tower lighting, and not using guy wires for the towers). Additionally, an active bird nest was observed on the existing tower at American Tower Site 83153. The Project calls for installation of an antenna, 700 MHz LTE radio, network equipment, and cables at this site; the existing tower is not scheduled for replacement. Nevertheless, additional coordination with USFWS will be required if the nest remains active and site activities occur during the migratory bird nesting period (March through August).

In their letter dated May 10, 2011, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) indicated that the Capilla Peak site lies within an important raptor fall migration corridor. However, this is not expected to be a significant concern during Project implementation because: (1) forest areas surrounding the site were deemed unsuitable for nesting or breeding due to fire damage and lack of mature pine canopy; and (2) Project activity will be limited to the footprint of the existing Capilla Peak facility. Accordingly, the USFS determined that no additional NEPA action is required for forests at this site.

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Based on USFWS and USFS consultations, the completed biological assessments, and adherence to applicable BMPs, NM DoIT has concluded that no significant adverse impacts on biological resources will occur as a result of Project implementation.

Historic and Cultural Resources

In a letter dated November 19, 2010, NTIA initiated consultation with the New Mexico State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) by sending a letter including a project map and description. Following the initiation letter, NM DoIT finalized project engineering and identified that the proposed construction, upgrade, and retrofitting at 70 sites included 59 existing telecommunications sites and 11 previously developed facilities. NM DoIT confirmed that all of the 70 digital microwave SIRCITS sites will use FCC licensed regulated spectrum and be subject to the *Program Comment for Streamlining Section 106 Review for Wireless Communication Facilities Construction and Modification Subject to Review Under the FCC Nationwide Programmatic Agreement (NPA) and/or the Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for the Collocation of Wireless Antenna*, (Program Comment) issued on November 25, 2009.

The Program Comment relieves NTIA from compliance with Section 106 with regard to effects of communication facilities construction or modification that have undergone or will undergo Section 106 review, or is exempt from Section 106 review, by the FCC under *FCC Nationwide Programmatic Agreement (FCC PA)* and/or the *Nationwide Programmatic Agreement for the Collocation of Wireless Antennas (FCC Collocation NPA)*. Additionally, the Program Comment shifts responsibility from NTIA to FCC for Native American consultation required for Section 106 compliance.

However, the FCC NPA and the Collocation NPA may not apply to towers proposed or located on land managed by federal agencies or tribal lands. In these cases, NTIA has lead Section 106 review responsibility for BTOP-funded activities, and fulfills these in collaboration with the land managing agency, NM DoIT and the FCC.

Upon a review of the individual tower and/or collocation sites, NM DoIT determined that the FCC PA and the FCC Collocation NPA may not apply to eighteen (18) of the replacement towers or collocations that are located on land owned or managed by the U.S. National Forest Service (USDA-FS), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

NM DoIT conducted preliminary archaeological investigations for the proposed tower and collocation sites located throughout the state of New Mexico. The findings are documented in two reports titled *Preliminary Cultural Resources Report for the New Mexico Statewide Interoperable Radio Communications Internet Transportation System (SIRCITS) Middle Mile Project* (Parametrix) and *Cultural Resources Investigations for 32 Communication Tower Sites for the Middle Mile Project Throughout New Mexico* (Bandy et al., SWCA Environmental Consultants: May 2011). These two reports were provided to the NM SHPO in June 2011.

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Based on reviewing these reports, on June 22, 2011 the NM SHPO provided NTIA with a preliminary opinion that the project should have No Adverse Effect on Historic Properties. However, as design and engineering are finalized, NM DoIT must complete site-specific tower reviews under the FCC NPA or in accordance with permitting requirements of the appropriate land management agency.

On October 28, 2011, NTIA, USDA-FS, SHPO, and NM DoIT entered into a Programmatic Agreement (PA) identifying the Section 106 review responsibilities of FCC, USDA-FS, BLM, and NOAA; establishing a mechanism for NTIA to release funds and authorize construction upon completion of specific tower reviews; and providing reporting requirements and administrative protocols for the phased compliance alternative.

First, the PA stipulates that NTIA will not release funds and NM DoIT will not initiate construction of any of the proposed tower sites or collocation sites until NM DoIT provides evidence that required Special Use Permits have been obtained and Section 106 reviews have been completed and include a finding concurrence from the controlling agency, the SHPO, and any consulting tribes.

Further, NM DoIT will not initiate construction of any proposed sites until Section 106 review for that particular site has been concluded in accordance with the PA and approved by NTIA. Additionally, if project changes or modifications are necessary, NM DoIT is required to notify and seek approval from NTIA, SHPO, and the relevant federal land managing agency prior to implementing a change, and confirm and complete any associated Section 106 review prior to initiating construction.

Second, the PA stipulates that FCC will conduct Section 106 reviews for any of the seventy (70) digital microwave SIRCITS sites subject to the terms of the Program Comment by virtue of qualifying for consultation under the FCC NPA, and/or FCC Collocation NPA. NM DoIT must provide written documentation of the conclusion of site-specific Section 106 reviews OR of the FCC's confirmation of collocation sites as exempt from further Section 106 review upon conclusion. After review and acceptance of the written documentation, NTIA may approve and advance funds for that particular tower site, and NM DoIT may initiate construction.

Third, the PA stipulates that USDA-FS, BLM, or NOAA are responsible for Section 106 compliance in consultation with SHPO and tribes for proposed new towers or collocations located on land managed by the respective agencies. Further, the PA stipulates that NM DoIT will provide the SHPO with documentation indicating the land managing agencies' determinations of eligibility for historic properties identified, as well as the agencies' findings of effect for all proposed new towers and collocations located on lands under their jurisdiction. NTIA will not release funds or approve construction of any of the proposed new towers or collocations on land owned or managed by USDA-FS, BLM, or NOAA until NM DoIT provides

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evidence that the required Special Use Permits have been obtained and Section 106 consultations completed.

Finally, the PA stipulates that NM DoIT will report to NTIA every three months describing the status of Section 106 review for each tower, the status of project construction, and any changes to the proposed undertaking.

On November 19, 2010, NTIA used the Tower Construction Notification System (TCNS) to provide project information to twenty-nine (29) tribes interested in the Project's geographical location (Arizona). However, in accordance with provisions of the PA, Tribes will receive all further notification of specific tower and collocation activities from either: (1) the Federal land managing agencies charged with permitting activities in accordance with those agencies' tribal consultation policies and practice; or (2) the FCC in accordance with their NPAs.

If any cultural material is discovered, NM DoIT will follow the provisions for inadvertent discovery stipulated by the lead federal agency for Section 106 purposes (either the FCC or the land managing agency). NM DoIT must stop construction immediately, notify the federal agencies, SHPO, and any interested tribes, and retain a qualified archaeologist to assess the cultural materials. In the event of the unanticipated discovery of human skeletal remains or protected Native objects, NM DoIT will be subject to all relevant state and federal laws and must stop work, notify the appropriate authorities (including law enforcement agencies), and follow all proscribed legal and agency requirements.

Based on the terms of the agreements and actions already implemented by NM DoIT, the Project is not expected to have significant adverse impacts on historic or cultural resources.

Aesthetic and Visual Resources

The sites to be included in this Project are existing commercial and governmental sites with existing towers or other elevated structures, sheds, generators, and electronic equipment. Many of the sites are colloquially referred to as "antenna farms." Accordingly, existing aesthetic and visual resources at the sites have already been altered. Project activities (e.g., replacing an existing tower, collocating antennas on an existing tower) are not expected to further degrade aesthetics or result in untenable visual impairment. The new infrastructure will be visually similar to the existing infrastructure, with no substantial change to the heights or profiles of the Project sites. In their evaluation of the visual resource APE, Parametrix and SWCA recommended placement of an antennas in a manner that will not worsen the existing aesthetic quality of the planned sites (e.g., not increasing the overall structure height, close proximity to existing telecommunications equipment). By following this recommendation, this Project is not expected to significantly affect aesthetic or visual qualities in the region.

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Land Use

Many of the various Project sites are currently used to support telecommunications and may be equipped with one or more existing towers. In urban settings, these “towers” may consist of an antenna structure on an existing tall building. As stated previously, land uses in areas surrounding Project sites include rural, urban, commercial, forested, industrial/mineral extraction, and rural commercial. Land ownership for the surrounding sites includes private owners, state government, local governments, the USFS, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). All Project sites will continue to serve their current function, but may be enhanced to also support the enhanced statewide telecommunication system. No land use conversion will occur as a result of this Project. Based on these findings, no significant adverse impacts on land use are expected to result from Project implementation.

Infrastructure

As stated previously, the identified Project sites already have commercial, industrial, or telecommunications infrastructure. Moreover, the Project will significantly upgrade the existing SIRCITS analog network and implement mobile 4G wireless service in the cities of Albuquerque and Santa Fe. The Project will also have positive impacts due to replacement towers, new shelters, state-of-the-art electronic equipment, and upgraded generators and HVAC equipment. Although new communications gear such as radios, cabling, antennas, and 4G mobile handsets will be provided under this Project, the overall infrastructure inventory will remain substantially the same before and after Project implementation, but will support a far more capable system. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on telecommunications infrastructure in New Mexico.

Socioeconomic Resources

The Project will upgrade analog portions of the existing SIRCITS network, providing enhanced broadband service for public safety and emergency medical service entities across New Mexico. In addition, 174 CAIs currently connected to analog portions of the network will gain access to greater bandwidth to support opportunities related to tele-health, video conferencing, and data applications. The upgraded network will also serve as the foundation for future delivery of high-speed broadband access to residents and other users in sparsely populated, remote areas and Tribal lands that do not presently have equitable access opportunities. Overall, this Project is expected to have a positive impact on socioeconomics in the planned service area.

Human Health and Safety

Operation of a communications tower site does not generate hazardous waste or other conditions that might be harmful to human health. Given the nature of point-to-point microwave communications, and the need to maintain line-of-sight between towers, the signal path is by necessity elevated far above the ground. Radiation from the existing towers does not generate harmful effects at ground level or to the general public in the surrounding areas. Based on these considerations, significant adverse impacts on human health and safety are not expected to occur during operation of the upgraded SIRCITS network. Conversely, improved telecommunications

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infrastructure may improve human health through tele-health, public safety, and emergency medical service applications.

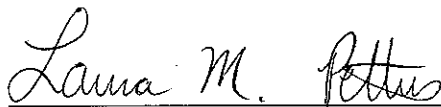
Cumulative Impacts

NM DoIT did not identify any significant cumulative impacts that will occur as a result of Project implementation.

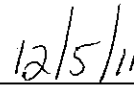
Decision

Based on the above analysis, NTIA concludes that constructing and operating the Project as defined by the preferred alternative, the PA, identified BMPs, and protective measures, will not require additional mitigation. A separate mitigation plan is not required for the Project. The analyses indicate that the proposed action is not a major Federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. NTIA has determined that preparation of an EIS is not required.

Issued:



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Date