

BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

BRIEFING STATEMENT

FEBRUARY 21, 1979

ISSUE:

Request to route a 115 kV line through a portion of Bandelier National Monument.

BACKGROUND:

On July 6, 1978 the Department of Energy (DOE) announced that Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) and Union Geothermal Company of New Mexico were selected to enter into a cooperative agreement with DOE to develop a 50 megawatt demonstration geothermal power plant in north-central New Mexico. The purpose of the project is to illustrate the reliability, economic feasibility and environmental acceptability of generating electricity from a hot-water resource. The successful completion of this project will demonstrate the viability of using geothermal resources as an alternate power source for the nation. Union Geothermal Company presently has 34 million invested in 17 wells. DOE is planning to provide 50 million to the project. PNM will invest another 50 million.

The project area is located in Redondo Creek area of the Jemez Mountains of Sandoval County, approximately 20 miles west of Los Alamos and 60 miles north of Albuquerque in the southwestern portion of Baca Location Number 1 (see attached map). Project facilities will include a well field, pipeline system, generation plant and a 115 kV transmission line. Prior to construction, an environmental impact statement will be prepared by the Department of Energy's Oak Ridge Laboratory and PNM will obtain a Certificate of Convenience and Necessity from the New Mexico Public Service Commission.

The project provides an opportunity to increase the power supply capacity to Los Alamos and on to Northern New Mexico by means of a 115 kV electrical transmission line terminating at TA-3 Substation. If the Jemez Area geothermal resources should be developed to the extent that additional transmission capacity is required, additional transmission line routes as needed will be sought to the south, west or north.

PNM attempted to route the 115 kV line eastward toward Los Alamos through Baca Location Number 1 in a manner to avoid as much environmental and visual impact as possible. Several alternate routes were also proposed, one being a route going south from the generation site which would cross the Santa Fe National Forest and the Bandelier National Monument, approaching Los Alamos from the southwest. Mr. James P. Dunigan, the owner of the Baca Location Number 1, favors this route, and PNM wishes to explore with the Santa Fe National Forest and Bandelier National Monument the feasibility of a southern corridor to Los Alamos, from which a specific route can be located.

In a meeting on November 8, 1978 Mr. Bob Humble of PNM met with the staff from the Southwest Regional Office and Bandelier National Monument to describe the project and requested that a route through Bandelier be considered. On February 2, 1979 Mr. Wayne Eckles of PNM requested the Service to provide a preliminary written agreement that a corridor will be found through Bandelier, emphasizing their need to know before they could proceed with their planning process and cooperative agreements.

Excerpts from the final environmental statement (FES 76-11) regarding the affected section of Bandelier National Monument acquired in 1976 are enclosed. This area is commonly referred to as the headwaters area of the Rito de Los Frijoles. Granting the corridor for the transmission lines would be in conflict to both the FES and NPS policy.

The National Park Service through the Denver Service Center is presently in the process of reviewing the Baca Location Number 1 as a potential addition to the National Park System. A portion of this area was proposed in an area investigation report dated July, 1964 - copies of the proposal and the current Task Directive are enclosed. Political interest for Federal acquisition of this large privately owned tract of land is positive at this time. Union Geothermal Company presently holds geothermal rights for the entire area.

ACTION NECESSARY:

A timely response to the Public Service Company of New Mexico is advised. A determination of the position the Service will take in this matter is paramount. Pressures for the right-of-way corridor are anticipated to increase. Failure to respond in a timely manner may escalate the issues to a higher authority and thereby eliminating Service input.

TIMETABLE:

April 1, 1979

ALTERNATIVES:

The National Park Service

1. Deny the request for a corridor:

This alternative would be consistent with the Mission of the Service as it relates to the protection of park lands and associated resources. It is also consistent with NPS policy and statements made justifying the acquisition of the headwaters area of the Rito de Los Frijoles in FES 76-11.

Because of the present national interest in alternate energy sources, this position may be viewed as an obstructionist position, resulting in either administrative or Congressional pressures or both. Since most conservation groups generally support "clean" energy sources, they will be in a weak position to oppose the project and/or support the Service.

If this position is overridden by higher authority, the NPS may have little or no say as to the location of the corridor or the final transmission line route.

PNM has other route alternatives however, which they seem reluctant to fully explore. These alternatives generally involve one or more of the following conditions:

- a. Choosing an alternate route to Los Alamos through the Baca Location Number 1, against the wishes of the present owner. This route could significantly impact the area which has high potential for inclusion into the National Park System or another land management agency.
- b. Routing the transmission line south through the Jemez Valley. This route is not desired by PNM because of the visual impact it would have on the Valley, the opposition they expect from summer home owners, the fact that

they would have to cross Indian land and the opposition they have already been promised and the distance involved.

- c. Routing the transmission line west to Cuba. Distance is the principal controlling factor here, in addition to the fact that it will not meet the anticipated needs of Los Alamos.

2. Provide for the corridor:

This alternative would be inconsistent with the Mission of the Service, NPS policy and the purposes for which the land was acquired.

It would resolve the threat of PNM condemning a right-of-way through the Baca Location Number 1, which could potentially impact the Valle Grande and thereby preserve the grand view of the Caldera. However, PNM has said they would be very reluctant to go this route because of the owners' objections.

By providing for the corridor, the Service is assured of the opportunity for route selection thereby minimizing both environmental and visual impacts.

Providing for this intrusion however, weakens the Service's position to hold the line in other areas of the system faced with similar problems either now or in the future. It also provides for little or no defense if future expansion of facilities across Bandelier is requested.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

CONTACT:

Wayne Cone - 505-988-6385
Associate Regional Director, Professional Services

John D. Hunter - 505-672-3861
Superintendent, Bandelier National Monument

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

BANDELIER NATIONAL MONUMENT

Excerpts from FES 76-11, pages 62, 63 and 71.

Headwater Area of the Rito de Los Frijoles - pages 62 and 63

The proposal for this area is acquisition to protect the natural drainage from the Jemez Mountains into Frijoles Canyon. Any logging in this area could cause flooding in the lower canyon, thus endangering archeological sites as well as the developed area in the canyon.

The ultimate transfer of ownership of these lands from private to Federal will result in development and use opportunities foregone. The highest and best use for this land - in private ownership - could well be for future development of a recreational subdivision with interim sources of income from grazing and timber operations.

The merchantable timber for the area totals over 13,000 M board feet. Also, approximately 34,000 Christmas trees could be harvested. Grazing capacity, with 7 to 10 acres per AUM, could provide forage for somewhere between 200 and 400 animals for one month and varying divisible numbers over the 5 month season.

The direct tax loss to Sandoval County that would occur - at 1972 assessed value and tax rates - would be less than \$100.00.

There are no known minerals of value existing on the property. Geothermal energy exploration is underway on adjacent lands. Acquisition of the headwater area would preclude the development of any mineral resources which exist in it.

The primary impact on the natural environment to result from the proposed land acquisition would be preservation through protection. The small development proposed would create a localized impact on less than 5 acres near the junction of the Dome Road and State Highway No. 4. Facilities designed for public contact would be constructed adjacent to the Dome Road on level terrain and involve grassland. A specific site development location will depend on traffic, soils and design studies and considerations. The 18 miles of right-of-way and boundary fencing will be designed to allow movement of game animals to deter domestic livestock. The 8 mile trail network is purely conceptual at this time. An environmental assessment will be made of the limited development proposals for the headwaters area congruent with detailed planning - if and when land acquisition seems probable.

Any irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources which would be involved in the proposed action should it be implemented - page 71.

Those lands proposed for addition to the Monument if approved by Congress and if acquired, will be committed to Park purposes and will no longer be available for commercial uses. This exchange of uses is irreversible unless reversion in the future is directed by Congress.

Eventual implementation of the concepts advanced in the Master Plan will commit labor, funds and materials. The materials, fuel and machinery used in construction are non-renewable resources, as are the funds expended.

The site locations for roads, parking areas and structures will destroy vegetation and disturb the soils. Re-establishment to natural conditions of both resources is technically possible should the facilities be obliterated in the future. However, the land committed to facilities should be considered irreversibly committed if it is not economically, socially, politically or esthetically feasible to return to the former situation within a relatively short time.

Some archeological features on the Canada de Cochiti Grant may require excavation in order to locate the visitor facility development. Tsankawi is proposed for excavation. When archeological research is undertaken, the resource is committed to present techniques of information recovery and it is, therefore, lost to possible future improved archeological excavation methods. Cultural resources are nonrenewable in nature and thus excavations, salvage and stabilization of archeological sites, whether for research in advance of construction, represents and irretrievable and irreversible commitment of such resources.