Transmission line routing and siting

Considering multiple sensitivities when siting a new line

The process for identifying routes for a new transmission line is a sensitive one that involves significant information gathering and evaluation. Input from local, state and federal officials, resource agencies, landowners and the public also contributes to route development. The Zephyr project team has spent more than a year identifying and reviewing sensitive environmental areas and land uses in seven western states.

Environmental and land use considerations

A partial list of more than 200 potential environmental and land use constraints that were identified and reviewed for the Zephyr Project includes:

- National forests
- Tribal lands
- National parks
- Historic trails
- National monuments
- National wildlife refuges
- Wilderness areas and wilderness study areas
- Areas of critical concern
- National conservation areas
- National historic landmarks and sites
- Sage grouse habitat
- Desert Tortoise habitat
- Department of Defense areas
- Department of Energy areas
- Inventoried roadless areas
- Wild and scenic rivers
- State managed lands
- Wetlands, rivers, lakes
- Vegetation cover
- Private lands

Selecting the proposed route for the Zephyr project

The Zephyr project team considered the following when developing the proposed route:

1. The project's 250,000-square-mile study area.
2. Geographic or land use based regional constraints, such as the Great Salt Lake and Grand Canyon National Park.
3. Routing opportunities, including existing transmission lines and federal energy corridors.
4. Land use areas, such as private, tribal and agency-managed lands.
5. After identifying nearly 6,000 miles of preliminary transmission line routes, specific environmental and land use constraints were identified. By comparing viable routes, the route with the fewest environmental and land use impacts was selected and became the proposed route.

Proposed route

The proposed route is 850 miles long and is located in four states (Wyoming, Colorado, Utah and Nevada). Approximately 60 percent of the proposed route crosses federal lands (primarily managed by the Bureau of Land Management), while 80 percent follows existing utility and federal energy corridors, and 20 percent follows proposed future utility corridors.