

B2H Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): Preliminary Preferred Alternatives May 2013

1. Which agencies are responsible for identifying the preliminary preferred alternatives and why?

The BLM and USFS are responsible for analyzing a range of reasonable alternatives and identifying preferred alternatives for the proposed B2H Transmission Line Project. The BLM, acting as lead federal agency, is continuing to prepare a draft EIS for the B2H Project under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). As required by NEPA, the EIS must identify and document the potential effects of the project as well as a range of reasonable alternatives that may help avoid, minimize or mitigate for these impacts. It is important to understand that all alternatives, including those not selected as preferred, will be analyzed equally in the draft EIS.

2. How did the federal agencies identify the preliminary environmentally preferred alternatives?

The BLM and the USFS interdisciplinary team and consultants, including managers and resource specialists, completed a robust and collaborative process to identify preliminary preferred alternatives for the B2H Project.

First, the agencies identified preliminary preferred alternatives comparison criteria, including major issues raised by the public: cultural resources, fish, land use, special designations, vegetation, visual resources, use of existing utility corridors, and wildlife. The agencies assessed the relative importance of each criterion on the selection and continued to rank alternatives in each geographic area based on each criterion. Complete documentation for how the preliminary preferred alternatives were selected will be included in the draft EIS.

3. How can I find out more details or provide my input about the preliminary preferred alternatives?

The public can view maps of the preliminary preferred alternatives on the project website. More information on the preliminary preferred alternatives identification process, analysis and potential mitigation options will be documented in the draft EIS. The public will have an opportunity to comment on the draft EIS, including the preliminary preferred alternatives, during the 90-day comment period following the publication of the draft EIS, later this year.

To be notified of the draft EIS publication date, as well as the upcoming public comment period, please sign up to receive mailings and emails for the B2H Project.

4. Are there ways to make the towers less reflective, i.e., less visible?

Galvanized steel lattice towers are one of the proposed structure types for the B2H Project. The tower configuration is open and airy and allows the eye to look through and beyond the structure to view objects in the background. Typically, the dull finish of the galvanized steel is muted against a variety of backdrops, whether against a hillside, forested land or even the sky. Painted structures are typically not used as they appear more unnatural and are more visible than galvanized structures.

The federal agencies are coordinating with Idaho Power to develop a list of visual mitigation options, including the use of other structure types or materials, to include in the draft EIS that will address potential visual effects along visually sensitive portions of the line. H-Frame structures, which consist of two tubular steel poles and a cross arm, may be used in some areas where shorter spans can be utilized or are necessary. H-Frame structures would have a weathering steel finish, which mimics the visual characteristics of a standard wood pole. Less reflective materials, such as pre-weathered or specialized colored steel, may be an option to better blend in with the surrounding landscape.

Burial of the transmission line will also be analyzed in the draft EIS, but it may be an unlikely option for this project due to the environmental impacts, extreme high cost and operational and maintenance restrictions.

5. Why did the federal agencies announce preliminary preferred alternatives now?

All parties involved with the B2H project are committed to transparency and open communication. In this case, the federal agencies completed enough analysis to make preliminary decisions, reviewed those decisions with resource staff and cooperating agencies, and therefore were able to share those preliminary decisions publicly. However, the alternatives will remain preliminary until the draft EIS is published later this year.