



File Code: 2720

Date: May 31, 2012

Dear Forest User:

The Carson National Forest is proposing to authorize Kit Carson Electric Cooperative (KCEC) to construct a new fiber-optic network on the existing KCEC electrical distribution system and within existing rights-of-way on the Carson National Forest. The fiber-optic network would be constructed on approximately 166 miles of existing aerial lines and installed directly above approximately 13 miles of existing buried lines. The proposal also includes an option to reroute the existing aerial electric line through Hondo Canyon to a joint buried utility trench along NM-150 (Ski Valley Road). Authorization would allow for continued maintenance along KCEC's existing electric and proposed fiber-optic networks to remove hazard trees in a corridor adjacent to the existing KCEC rights-of-way, as defined in the KCEC Operations and Maintenance Plan. Maps showing the locations of the proposed network installation, including the Hondo Canyon option, are available on the Carson National Forest website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/carson>.

The KCEC would be authorized to construct and maintain the proposed network within existing disturbed corridors and would avoid sensitive resources, such as southwestern willow flycatcher habitat during breeding season and archaeological sites. The KCEC would not construct the system during seasonal wet conditions. All waterways and wetlands would be spanned aerially or bored beneath. In areas where the cable would be buried, the ground would be recontoured and reseeded with native species.

Based on a preliminary assessment, the Forest Service intends to categorically exclude the proposed project under 36 CFR § 220.6(e)(2) – Additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor. A proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement or environmental assessment only if there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action and if the proposed action is within a category listed in 36 CFR § 220.6.

This categorical exclusion (CE) is subject to the Forest Service's Notice, Comment, and Appeal procedures (36 CFR 215), which require a formal 30-day comment period and an opportunity to administratively appeal the decision. We are asking whether you may have any issues or concerns regarding the proposed action, as well as informing you of the 30-day comment period for the proposed action and how your comments qualify you to appeal the subsequent decision.

### **Purpose and Need for the Proposed Action**

In September 2010, the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Utilities Service approved funding for KCEC to build and operate a fiber-to-the-home network using American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. The network will be capable of exceeding the Federal Communications Commission's goal of delivering affordable high-speed broadband service in excess of 100 Mbps to Taos, Rio Arriba, and Colfax County residents and 1 gigabit per second broadband service to anchor institutions such as schools, hospitals, and government. The purpose of the network is to reach 29 communities comprising of roughly 20,500 households, 3,600 businesses, and 183 critical community institutions, and two Native American pueblos (Taos Pueblo and Picuris Pueblo), within a 2,951 square mile rural, underserved area in Taos, Colfax, and Rio Arriba counties in northern New Mexico.



The network will also allow KCEC to initiate a “smart” grid for their electrical system, using “smart” electrical meters that can be installed using funds provided by a separate electrical program. Once initiated, the “smart” grid will allow KCEC to detect power outages and faults in real-time and also provide the ability for remote meter reading.

Because KCEC’s existing electrical system crosses NFS lands managed by the Carson National Forest, KCEC’s existing permits need to be amended to include the new fiber-optic system.

### **How Do You Submit Comments?**

Comments must meet the requirements of 36 CFR § 215.6. Comments (written or oral) must be submitted to: **Diana Trujillo, Acting Forest Supervisor.**

Comments may be submitted by: **U.S. Postal Service:** Carson National Forest, 208 Cruz Alta Rd., Taos, NM 87571. **Email:** comments-southwestern-carson@fs.fed.us. Comments must be in: Adobe (.pdf), MS-Word (.doc or .docx), rich text format (.rtf), text (.txt), or hypertext markup language (.html). Please include “KCEC Fiber-optic Proposal” in the subject line. **Hand delivery:** 208 Cruz Alta Rd., Taos, NM. Hand delivered comments will be accepted on weekdays between 8:00 am and 4:30 pm.

Comments received, including names and addresses, will be part of the public record and available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be considered; however, those who submit comments anonymously will not have standing to appeal the final decision. Also, when comments are submitted anonymously the Forest Service is unable to provide the commenter with the subsequent decision document.

### **How is the Comment Deadline Calculated?**

The comment period ends 30 days following the date of publication of a legal notice in *The Taos News*. This publication date is the exclusive means for calculating the time to submit comments on the proposed action. Those wishing to comment on this proposal should not rely upon dates or timeframes provided by any other source.

### **Who May Appeal the Decision?**

Only those who provide comments or otherwise express interest in the proposed action during the comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision (36 CFR § 215.13). Each individual or representative from each organization submitting comments must either sign the comments or verify identity upon request to have standing to appeal.

Sincerely,

/s/ Diana M. Trujillo  
DIANA M. TRUJILLO  
Acting Forest Supervisor

