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Nine Federal Agencies Enter into a Memorandum of Understanding Regarding Transmission Siting on Federal Lands

WASHINGTON – Obama Administration officials today released a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed by nine Federal Departments and Agencies to make it faster and simpler to build transmission lines on Federal lands. The goal of the agreement is to speed approval of new transmission lines, reduce expense and uncertainty in the process, generate cost savings, increase accessibility to renewable energy and jumpstart job creation.

As President Obama announced in his speech yesterday, the agreement “will help break down the bureaucratic barriers that currently make it slow and costly to build new transmission lines on federal lands.”

The MOU has been signed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of Commerce, Department of Defense, Department of Energy, Environmental Protection Agency, the Council on Environmental Quality, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and Department of the Interior.

“The process of siting and permitting new transmission lines on federal lands has posed a barrier to efficient grid enhancements. Under President Obama’s leadership, we want to expand and modernize our nation’s transmission grid so we can access renewable energy sources, improve reliability, and reduce grid congestion. This is part of a comprehensive effort to create a clean energy future that also promotes energy efficiency and conservation,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality.

“To build America's clean energy economy we must update our transmission grid for the 21st century, so that we can efficiently move power from the new energy frontier to the places it is consumed,” said Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar. “The common-sense reforms in this MOU will help bring the federal house in order by improving coordination among agencies, cutting red tape, and by making transmission siting on public lands more sensible and straightforward. This MOU also recognizes DOI’s key role in ensuring that transmission siting is done in a way that protects America's natural and cultural heritage, and in consultation with tribal nations.”

“This agreement represents the Obama Administration's commitment to cutting red tape so we can create jobs and build a 21st Century clean energy economy,” said Energy Secretary Steven Chu.

“This new agreement will make government more efficient and improve the transmission of electricity to communities across the country as we move toward achieving a nationwide smart grid,” said Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke.

“The Obama administration recognizes that it is imperative for work to begin today to rebuild and modernize our electric transmission grid, not only to get renewable and alternative energy to market, but to ensure the reliability of America’s energy grid,” said Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack.

“For rural America, it means increased opportunity for income from power – solar, wind and biofuels – generated in rural areas. And that means jobs and economic development for rural America. USDA is proud to be part of this effort.”

“We’re clearing the way for public and private investments in cutting edge smart grid innovations, which will make it easier and cheaper for homeowners and businesses to get running on clean American energy,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “President Obama is committed to protecting our nation’s economic and national security by reducing our dependence on foreign oil and making America the leader in the clean energy economy. Strong inter-agency coordination will be a critical component of this unprecedented nationwide effort.”

“This agreement is setting the stage so that every time you flip on the lights you are able to enjoy the benefits of clean, renewable energy and the technological advancements of a smart grid,” said Chairman Jon Wellinghoff of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

“The Department of Defense supports expanding and modernizing the transmission grid as a key element of increased energy security. This Transmission Siting MOU establishes an unprecedented opportunity for the Department of Defense to participate early in the planning and review process, allowing for more thoughtful and timely input and minimizing delays in the siting and permitting,” said Dr. Dorothy Robyn, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense for Installations and Environment.

“The commitment of these agencies to better coordinate federal reviews on the siting of electric transmission lines will improve delivery of critical energy resources to the American people,” said John L. Nau, III, Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. “The ACHP looks forward to working with these agencies and state and tribal partners to ensure that historic preservation values are integrated into decisions about our nation’s electrical transmission system.”

The agreement will cut approval time off the normal Federal permit process and help break down the barriers to siting new transmission lines by:

- Designating a single Federal point-of-contact for all Federal authorizations;
- Facilitating coordination and unified environmental documentation among project applicants, Federal Agencies, states, and tribes involved in the siting and permitting process;
- Establishing clear timelines for agency review and coordination; and
- Establishing a single consolidated environmental review and administrative record.

Instead of applicants going to multiple agencies, a single lead agency will coordinate all permits and approvals. The new process will keep applications on track by requiring agencies to set and meet clear deadline and improve transparency by creating a single record to be posted on line. The MOU does not alter the authority of any participating agencies, and all existing environmental reviews and safeguards are maintained fully.

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