Decision Memo

Eversource S136 Line Structure and

Optical Ground Wire Replacement Project

USDA Forest Service

Towns of Jefferson and Randolph

White Mountain National Forest, Androscoggin Ranger District

Coos County, New Hampshire

Decision and Rationale for Categorically Excluding the Proposed Action

After careful consideration of public input, the recommendations of appropriate resource specialists, and the requirement of applicable laws and regulations, I have decided to implement the S136 Line Structure and Optical Ground Wire Replacement Project in Jefferson and Randolph, Coos County, New Hampshire. The S136 line replacement structures are owned by the Public Service Company of New Hampshire doing business as Eversource Energy (Eversource), which serves as the project proponent. The project area includes discrete areas along Eversource's existing transmission line right-of-way (ROW) within the Androscoggin Ranger District of the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF), including a portion of ROW west of Jefferson Notch Road in Jefferson, a short access road outside the ROW and a segment of ROW west of the private drive originating at Castle Trailhead in Randolph, and portions of ROW west of Dolly Copp Road (also known as Pinkham B Road) in Randolph. The S136 transmission line is 115-kilovolts. The portions of the S136 transmission line ROW described above are about 150 feet wide and are accessed in multiple locations (Figure 1). The proposed action includes replacing existing wooden structures that are damaged and replacing outdated static grounding wire with optical ground wire associated with the S136 line, as described below. The purpose of the project is to promote public safety, provide adequate public service, and ensure the safe and continuous operation of the line.

Project activities include replacing fifteen existing wooden H-frame structures with new, steel H-frame structures within Eversource's ROW (two structures in Jefferson and thirteen structures in Randolph). To access the 13 replacement structures in Randolph, Eversource proposes to cross about 125 feet of WMNF land outside the S136 line ROW using an existing access road. The structure replacement process would consist of drilling holes near the existing structures. A metal can would be installed below the ground surface to the desired depth. The new structure would then be installed in the can and backfilled with clean, suitable rock or gravel material. Some replacement structures would require guy wires anchored into the ground for additional stability. Guy wires would be located within the ROW at a maximum distance of 35 feet from the replacement structure. Where guy wires already exist, anchors maybe reused if found to still withstand necessary forces and if correctly located. Once a new structure is installed and stable, the overhead wires from the old structure would be transferred to the new structure, and old structures would be removed from the site.

In addition to structure replacements, project activities include replacing optical ground wire along the entire length of the S136 line within the WMNF. Optical ground wire replacement work would involve

restringing the upper most static wire across all structures, used to electrically ground the line and provide for communication between Eversource's substations. To replace the optical ground wire, Eversource requires vehicle access in specific areas along the ROW to pull and tension the replacement wire. In general, access would be needed to most corner structures to allow workers to appropriately sag the wire to the correct elevation. Ground access is also needed to optical ground wire pull pad locations where wire would be pulled off a reel and fed across the structures to the opposite end of the pull section, where the wire would be connected together with the next pull section. Helicopters would initially string a lightweight rope line through pulleys on each structure prior to the heavier wire being pulled via ground equipment as described above. Optical ground wire work would be completed following structure replacements and would use access roads and work pads created during the structure replacements wherever possible.

The project would be implemented using mobile cranes to set new structures, flatbed trucks to deliver materials, and other mobile equipment such as drill rigs, frontend loaders, and excavators. Existing roads would be used to access the ROW. Project activities would begin in June 2020 and would likely be completed by the end of November, weather permitting. Additional information is provided in the "Small Projects Day Form 1 – Project Information" (attached).

Project Design Features

The following project-specific measures to avoid or minimize potential impacts to key resources shall be implemented as part of this project.

- The project proponent would obtain the required federal, state, and/or local permits prior to implementing activities in jurisdictional wetland or other waters of the United States.

- All wetland areas within work pad locations or crossed by access roads would be temporarily matted during construction. Mats would be comprised of sawcut timbers connected by metal bolts that are designed to distribute weight and thereby minimize ground disturbance.

- Smaller streams crossed by access roads would be completely spanned with a temporary mat bridge, to avoid impacts to the bed and banks of the stream. Larger streams, such as the Israel River (between structures 175 and 176), would have timber mat bridges with small mat sections placed within the rocky stream bed and along the channel parallel to the flow of water. These larger crossings would also be scheduled for lower-flow periods (i.e. summer and fall) to avoid and minimize impacts.

- Erosion and sedimentation controls would be installed prior to ground disturbing activities. The erosion control methods and materials would follow the Best Management Practices Manual for Utility Maintenance in and Adjacent to Wetlands and Waterbodies in New Hampshire, published by the New Hampshire Department of Natural & Cultural Resources (March 2019 version).

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA). The action is a routine activity within the following category of exclusion found at 36 CFR 220.6(e)(2), additional construction or reconstruction of existing telephone or utility lines in a designated corridor. This category of action is applicable because the proposed project involves reconstructing an existing utility transmission line by replacing poles and wires in a designated corridor.

Based on information presented in this document and the project record, including input from appropriate resource specialists, I have evaluated the resource conditions listed in 36 CFR 220.6(b)(1) and determined

there are no extraordinary circumstances related to this project. Supporting information is provided in the "Small Projects Day Form 2 – Resource Specialist Review" (attached).

Public Involvement

This project was listed on the quarterly White Mountain National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA) beginning in April 2020. We received nine comments (representing two separate entities). I have reviewed the public scoping comments and considered them in refining and making the decision.

Findings Required by and/or Related to Other Laws and Regulations

My decision is consistent with the 2005 White Mountain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. This decision also complies with all applicable laws and regulations, including the National Environmental Policy Act, National Forest Management Act, Endangered Species Act, and National Historic Preservation Act.

Archaeological sites and historic properties or areas

A Phase I archaeological survey was completed for the project. No historic properties were located on the WMNF lands included in the project, and therefore, the project would have no effect under the provisions of Section 106 of the NHPA. The New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources (NHDHR) concurred with the survey results on April 2, 2020.

Administrative Review and Implementation Date

Decisions that are categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS are not subject to an administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 215. Therefore, the implementation of my decision may begin immediately.

Contact Information

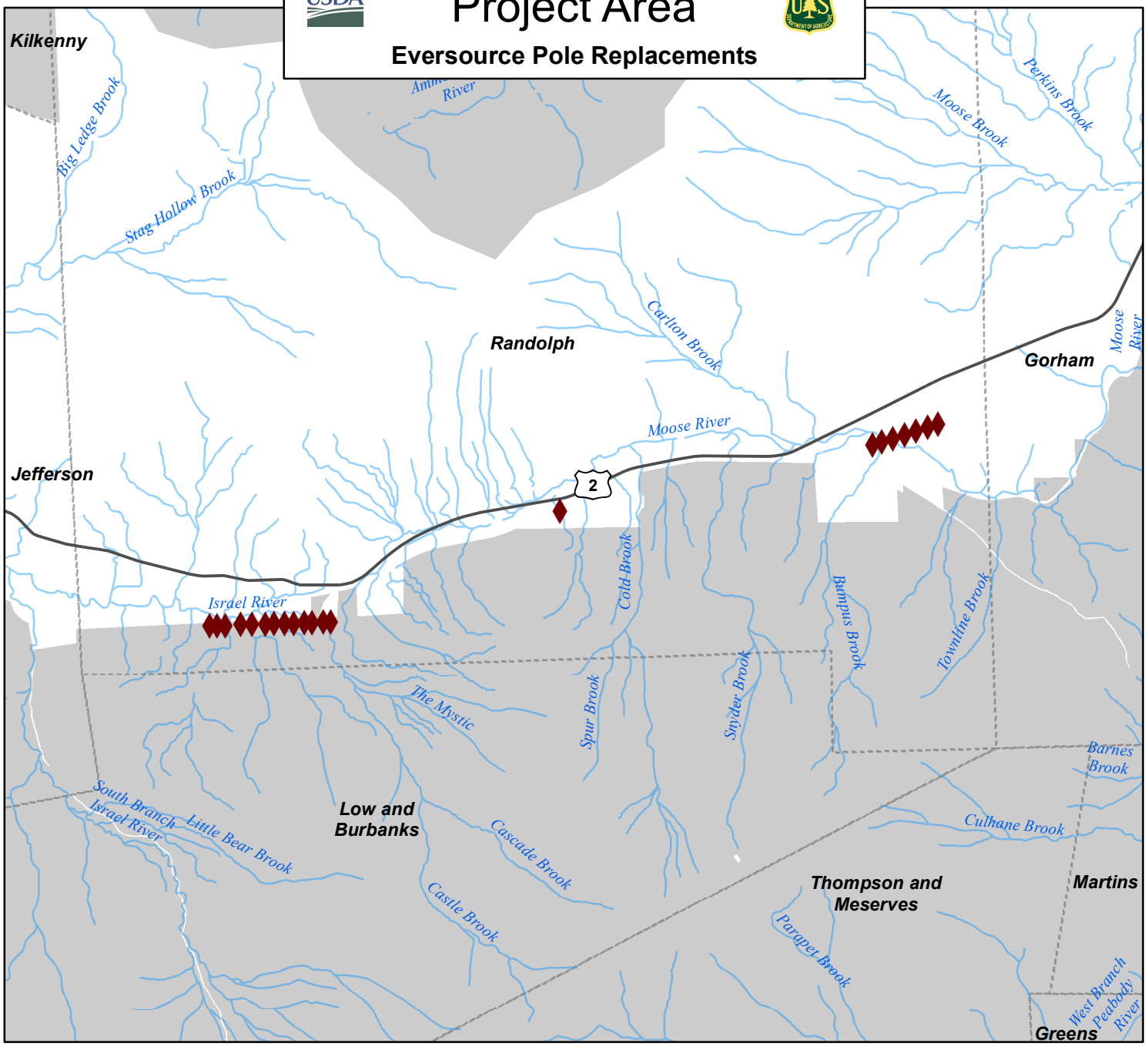
For additional information concerning this decision, contact: Thomas M. Moore by email at thomas.m.moore@usda.gov, by mail at Androscoggin Ranger District, WMNF, 300 Glen Road, Gorham, NH 03581, or by phone at 603-466-2713 x 1226.

7/2/2020

Jennifer Barnhart — Date
Androscoggin District Ranger

Project Area

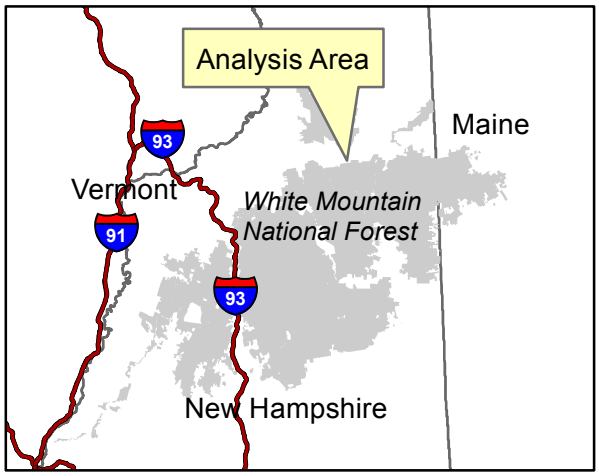
Eversource Pole Replacements



0 1.25 2.5 5 Miles

N

Vicinity Map



Legend

- ProposedStructures_Randolph
- Interstate
- Road
- Waterway
- Town
- National Forest Land

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