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**SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC
UTILITIES COMMISSION**

Rural Development

January 23, 2015

Rural Utilities Service

1400 Independence
Ave SW, Stop 1571
Washington, DC
20250

RE: Big Bend – Witten Transmission Line – Environmental Assessment

Dear Interested Party:

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Rural Utilities Service (RUS) is releasing for public comment the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the proposed Big Bend – Witten Transmission Line in Lyman and Tripp Counties, South Dakota. Basin Electric Power Cooperative (Basin Electric) proposes to construct an approximately 70-mile long, 230-kV single-circuit transmission line, a new Western Area Power Administration (Western) switchyard called Lower Brule Switchyard, an addition to the existing Witten Substation, and approximately two miles of 230-kV double-circuit transmission line between Big Bend Dam and the new Lower Brule Switchyard. Basin Electric is requesting funding from RUS for the proposed project.

RUS is serving as the lead Federal agency responsible for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the proposed project. NEPA requires RUS to take into account the potential environmental effects of Agency actions, and to seek input from the public, agencies, and tribes as part of the environmental assessment process.

Enclosed are electronic and hard copies of the EA prepared for the proposed transmission line. We are requesting that you submit any comments you may have on the EA by February 27, 2015. The EA is also available on both the Basin Electric website at [http://www.basinelectric.com/Miscellaneous/pdf/Construction Projects/BigBendtoWitten EA Nov 2014 Final.pdf](http://www.basinelectric.com/Miscellaneous/pdf/Construction%20Projects/BigBendtoWitten_EA_Nov_2014_Final.pdf) and the Western website at [http://www.wapa.gov/ugp/Environment/documents/BigBendtoWitten EA Nov 2014 Final.pdf](http://www.wapa.gov/ugp/Environment/documents/BigBendtoWitten_EA_Nov_2014_Final.pdf).

Questions should be directed to Mr. Richard Fristik, Senior Environmental Protection Specialist, RUS, Engineering and Environmental Staff, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Stop 1571, Washington, D.C. 20250-1571, telephone (202) 720-5093, fax (202) 690-0649, e-mail: richard.fristik@wdc.usda.gov or Mr. Kevin Solie, Basin Electric Power Cooperative, 1717 E. Interstate Avenue, Bismarck, ND, 58503-0564, telephone 701-557-5495, e-mail: ksolie@bepc.com.

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If you wish to file a Civil Rights program complaint of discrimination, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html, or at any USDA office, or call (866) 632-9992 to request the form. You may also write a letter containing all of the information requested in the form. Send your completed complaint form or letter to us by mail at U.S. Department of Agriculture, Director, Office of Adjudication, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410, by fax (202) 690-7442 or email at program.intake@usda.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Fristik". The signature is written in a cursive style with some loops and flourishes.

Richard Fristik, Acting Director
Engineering and Environmental Staff
Rural Utilities Service

Enclosures