



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

South Central Utah Telephone Association Special Use Project Environmental Assessment

Powell Ranger District, Dixie National Forest, Garfield County, UT
September 2015



**SOUTH CENTRAL UTAH TELEPHONE ASSOCIATION SPECIAL USE PROJECT
Environmental Assessment**

Garfield County, Utah

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1 – Purpose and Need for Action.....	1
Background.....	1
Proposed Action.....	2
Issues.....	2
Chapter 2 – Alternatives Including the Proposed Action.....	3
Project Design Features.....	3
Chapter 3 – Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences.....	5
Extraordinary Circumstances.....	5
Hydrology and Soils.....	5
Wildlife.....	6
Recreation and Scenic Resources.....	6
Social and Economic.....	6
Environmental Justice and Civil Rights.....	7
Chapter 4 – Consultation and Coordination.....	8
Appendix A – Project Map.....	9

CHAPTER 1 – PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION

Background

South Central Utah Telephone Association (SCUTA) began offering telephone service to the rural areas of southern Utah in 1953. The Forest Service has received an application from SCUTA to construct a fiber optic line to the communications site at the top of Wilson Peak. At the same time SCUTA's Special Use Permit is up for reissuance and therefore the Forest Service has prepared this Environmental Assessment (EA) to allow the construction of the new line, which would improve communication in the general area, update SCUTA's current permit, as well as reissue the permit for a new term.

Project Location

The project analysis area is located within the Powell Ranger District of the Dixie National Forest in Garfield County, Utah (see Appendix A – Project Map). The project area extends from Utah State Highway 12 in Red Canyon south the SCUTA communication tower on Wilson Peak and east to Ruby's Inn (Bryce Canyon City). The legal description for the project area is:

Construct buried fiber optic cable from Red Canyon to the Wilson Peak communication site

The line is 24,770 feet in length, area needed is 15 feet in width during the construction phase; 10 feet in width once constructed. Located in:

Sections 30 & 31, T35S, R4W;

Section 6, T36S, R4W; and

Sections 1, 11, & 12, T36S, R4½W, Salt Lake Base and Meridian (SLBM).

Existing buried fiber optic line which replaced authorized overhead line from Ruby's Inn to Bryce Canyon National Park (BCNP)

NEPA was completed for this change in 1996; however the permit was never amended. Existing line is located in:

Section 19, T36S, R3W and

Sections 24 & 25, T36S, R4W, SLBM.

Reissue a Special Use Permit (prior number PWL415301) for buried fiber optic cable for a new term

Located in:

Sections 30, 31, 32, & 33, T35S, R4W;

Sections 22, 23, 25, 26, 27, & 36, T35S, R4½W;

Section 19, T36S, R3W;

Sections 6, 24, & 25, T36S, R4W; and

Sections 1, 11, & 12, T36S, R4½W, SLBM.

Purpose and Need for Action

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve communications in the general area, update SCUTA's current permit, and reissue the permit for a new term. Specifically there is a need to:

- Authorize the installation of a fiber optic line on National Forest System (NFS) lands from Red Canyon to the Wilson Peak communication site and amend SCUTA's current permit to include the new line,
- Amend SCUTA's current permit to include the existing fiber optic telephone line on NFS lands from Ruby's Inn to BCNP, and
- Reissue SCUTA's Special Use Permit, as amended, for a new term.

Proposed Action

To meet the purpose and need for action, the Dixie National Forest in response to an application from SCUTA proposes to (see Appendix A – Project Map):

- Authorize the installation of a fiber optic line on NFS lands from Red Canyon to the Wilson Peak communication site and amend SCUTA's current permit to include the new line,
- Amend SCUTA's current permit to include the existing fiber optic telephone line on NFS lands from Ruby's Inn to BCNP, and
- Reissue SCUTA's Special Use Permit, as amended, for a new term.

Public Involvement

Public involvement is a key component in the planning process. The Dixie National Forest invited public comment and participation regarding this proposal with a variety of scoping methods, including:

- Listing in the quarterly "Schedule of Proposed Actions" (SOPA) beginning in February 2015.
- A scoping letter describing the proposal was sent out to a list of known interested persons and organizations, including tribal governments, in February 2015.
- In February 2015, the Powell Ranger District began the official 30-day comment period for the SCUTA Special Use Project Environmental Assessment (EA). A legal notice was published in the *The Spectrum* on February 25, 2015 inviting public comment on the Proposed Action.

Only one comment was received during scoping that was supportive of the project.

Issues

An Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) and the Responsible Official reviewed all public comments to identify issues for this proposal based on comments received. No issues or unresolved conflicts were identified through scoping that would indicate a need for additional alternatives or mitigation measures.

CHAPTER 2 – ALTERNATIVES

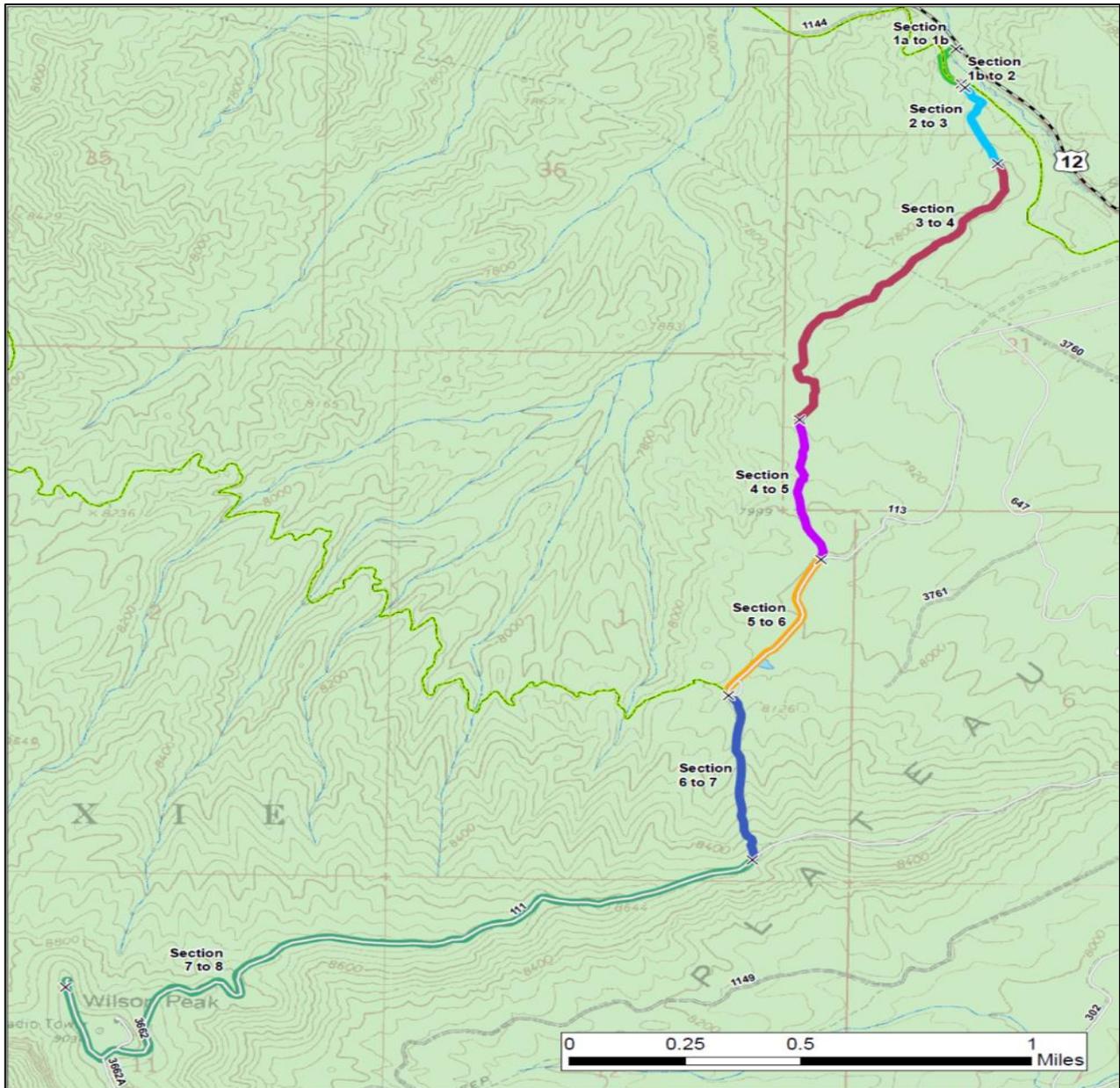
No other alternatives were developed for this proposal. No action was described by contrasting impacts to the current condition and expected future condition if action were not taken.

Design features¹ to be implemented with the Proposed Action (see Figure 1)

Table 1. Project Design Features for the Sections of Proposed New Buried Line

Section	Start and End Coordinates Of Sections	Design Features/Discussion
1a to 1b	388017.00 m E 4176353.00 m N 388036.00 m E 4176203.00 m N	Seed portion of disturbance from highway to bike path. Seed mixes will include species that germinate rapidly to provide a quick cover of vegetation for stabilization. Seed mixes used for rehabilitation purposes will be noxious weed free certified
1b to 2	388036.00 m E 4176203.00 m N 388048.00 m E 4176185.00 m N	Runs through the corner of a seasonally intermittent draw with thick grasses and some tall sagebrush serving as riparian vegetation. The sod should be salvaged and placed back on the top of the disturbed path when the line is buried.
2 to 3	388048.00 m E 4176185.00 m N 388162.00 m E 4175859.00 m N	Crosses some exposed Claron soils. However, slopes are relatively low. Addition of organic matter in the form of needles and small wood to the disturbed path should occur as soon as possible after installation of the line. Seeding should also occur with a native seed mix (see project record).
4	388162.00 m E 4175859.00 m N 387472.00 m E 4174756.00 m N	Follows along a closed road. Seeding should occur after disturbance and measures should be taken to effectively reclose the road after use in order to prevent illegal use (brush or other woody material could be placed on the path).
5	387472.00 m E 4174756.00 m N 387547.00 m E 4174153.00 m N	Crosses some exposed Claron soils and ephemeral draws. However, slopes are relatively low. Addition of organic matter in the form of needles and small wood to the disturbed path should occur as soon as possible after installation of the line. Seeding should also occur.
6	387547.00 m E 4174153.00 m N 387225.00 m E 4173571.00 m N	Runs along an open road – no design features proposed.
7	387225.00 m E 4173571.00 m N 387308.00 m E 4172862.00 m N	The first portion of this path (~400 ft.) is relatively flat and the design features for section 5 should also be used here. The remaining steeper portion should also have these same design features as section 5 and, where possible, the path should be located so that it runs diagonal to the slope, essentially side sloping the hillside (allowing for water to run across and off of the path) rather than running parallel to the slope (which allows water to run down the path and can lead to gulying in these erosive soils). The installation of drainage bars every 100 feet or less should occur if the path is running parallel to the hillslope.
8	387308.00 m E 4172862.00 m N 384917.00 m E 4172314.00 m N	Runs along an open road – no design features proposed.

¹These design features will meet the direction of the National Core Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands technical guide.



Dixie National Forest
Powell Ranger District
South Central Utah Telephone Association
Hydrological Sections

Wilson Peak Line Hydro Sections		Legend	
Section 1a to 1b	Intermittent Streams	National Forest	BLM
Section 1b to 2	6th Level HUC Watersheds	NPS	Private
Section 2 to 3	Highway	State	
Section 3 to 4	Open Roads		
Section 4 to 5	Admin. Roads		
Section 5 to 6	Trail Non-Motorized		
Section 6 to 7			
Section 7 to 8			

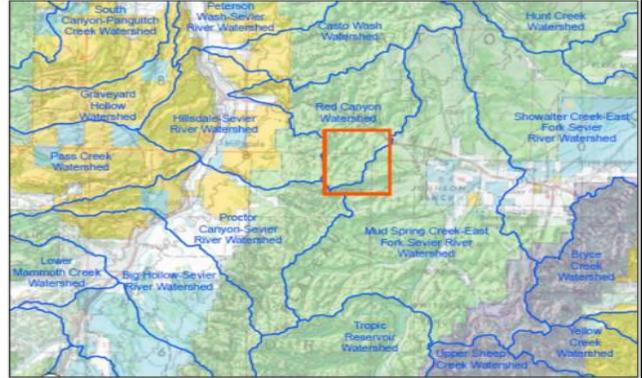


Figure 1. Map illustrating the sections of the proposed buried line that corresponds with the project design features in Table 1.

CHAPTER 3 – AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the potential impacts of the proposed action for each impacted resource. Because no issues were raised in regards to this project during scoping, the analysis within this chapter only documents consideration of extraordinary circumstances (FSH 1909.15 chapter 31.2). A hydrology and soils report as well as a wildlife specialist report and a biological assessment were also prepared in support of this project and are incorporated by reference to supplement the information summarized in this chapter. Summaries of the impacts are listed below. The reports in their entirety can be found in the project record located at the Powell Ranger District in Panguitch, Utah.

Extraordinary Circumstances

- (1) Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species*** – The project area is known to have suitable habitat for Utah Prairie Dog. A biological assessment was prepared and a determination of May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect for the Utah Prairie Dog was made (See Wildlife Specialist Report and Biological Assessment). US Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted in June 2015 and concurrence with this determination was received on August 19, 2015 (see project record).
- (2) Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds*** – None are present in the project area.
- (3) Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas*** – None are present in the project area.
- (4) Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas*** – The project is neither located in nor adjacent to an inventoried roadless area or potential wilderness area.
- (5) Research natural areas*** – The Red Canyon Research Natural Area, located north of Highway 12 near Black Mountain, is adjacent to the project area but will not be impacted by this project as all ground disturbing activities will be south of Highway 12 up to the existing communication site on top of Mt. Wilson.
- (6) American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites*** – No known sites in the project area are anticipated to be affected by this project. SHPO concurrence was received on June 23, 2015.
- (7) Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas*** – Neither known archaeological sites nor historic properties or areas present in the project area are anticipated to be affected by this project. SHPO concurrence was received on June 23, 2015 (see project record).

Hydrology and Soils

The desired short term and long term condition of water and soil resources within this project area is that water quality, soil productivity, and riparian conditions will be maintained or improved. Reissuing the permit and amending it will not have any impacts on the hydrology and soils in the project area. The fiber optic line will not cross or run near (within 100 meters of) any live bodies of water, therefore it was assumed that water quality and riparian systems will not be measurably impacted.

The fiber optic line will be buried through approximately 50 feet of a seasonally intermittent draw. This will lead to some disturbance of the vegetation within this draw. However, with the adherence to project design features the disturbance to the vegetation would likely last less than 2 years and would not impact the functioning of the intermittent draw.

Approximately 1.2 miles of new soil disturbance will occur with burying the fiber optic line (soil disturbance outside of those areas is already disturbed by roads). Although these soils will be disturbed, with the avoidance of trees while digging the line and implementation of design features, they will over time (within 5 to 10 years) likely have recovered in productivity to near current levels. With the implementation of the design features, there are not anticipated to be any measurable direct, indirect or cumulative impacts.

Wildlife

Species or habitat that may be present and potentially affected by the proposed actions include Bald Eagles, Flammulated Owls, Northern Goshawk, Spotted Bats, Townsend's Big-eared Bats, Mule Deer, Rocky Mountain Elk, Northern Flickers, and migratory birds. No calving/fawning are found within the affected project area, thus there will be no effects to these species. Reissuing the permit and amending it will not have any impacts on these species or their habitat. The direct, indirect and cumulative effects to these species from burying the fiber optic line will be minimal and discountable. For more details see the Wildlife Specialist Report available in the project record.

The project area contains very little suitable habitat for Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive species. There is suitable foraging habitat for the Mexican Spotted Owl, but this species is not known to occur on the Powell Ranger District. There is No Affect from this project to dispersing Mexican Spotted Owl. There is suitable habitat for the Utah Prairie Dog, and prairie dogs have been found adjacent to the proposed fiber optic line. Monitoring for these species will need to be conducted throughout the construction phase. Habitat conditions for this species are poor due to the undesirable adjacent vehicle traffic along U.S. Highway 12. Project effects on these species have been documented in the BA for this project. The US Fish and Wildlife Service was consulted in June 2015 and concurrence with a determination of May Affect Not Likely to Adversely Affect the Utah Prairie Dog was received on August 19, 2015.

Recreation and Scenic Resources

Recreation and scenic resources exist in the project area. Highway 12 is a National Scenic Byway that runs through Red Canyon which is a popular area for tourists visiting the area. Reissuing the permit and amending it will not have any impacts on recreation and scenic resources. Because the fiber optic line will be buried and the equipment used is small and capable of maneuvering around trees, rocks, etc., the impacts from this action will be limited to the estimated two weeks it takes to implement the project where someone may see or come across the equipment and operators. There will not be any long-term impacts to recreation and scenic resources from this project.

Social and Economic

The communication site at the top of Mt. Wilson is an important site to the geographic area. Reissuing the permit and amending it will not have any impacts on social and economic resources. Installation of the fiber optic line will improve the quality and types of services the various communication sites provide. This

change while beneficial is limited in scope and intensity to the geographic area served by the communication sites.

Environmental Justice and Civil Rights

Environmental Justice effects were considered in compliance with Executive Order 12898, Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low Income Populations. The South Central Utah Telephone Association Special Use Project was analyzed to determine if minority and/or low-income populations would experience disproportionately high adverse effects due to project implementation. The alternative considered in detail provides equal access to National Forest System lands to all persons and would not disproportionately affect minority and/or low-income populations.

CHAPTER 4 – CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

The Forest Service consulted the following individuals, Federal, State and local agencies, tribes and non-Forest Service persons during the development of this environmental assessment.

ID Team:

Paul Hancock	Powell District Ranger
Scott Henrie	Co-Team Leader / Special Uses
Brooke Shakespeare	Hydrologist
Maia London	Archeologist
Jake Schoppe	Wildlife Biologist

Support:

Kathy Slack	Special Uses
Kevin Wright	Dixie Public Services Staff Officer
Hope Woodward	NEPA Coordinator
Josey Muse	NEPA Coordinator

Federal, State, and Local Agencies:

Garfield County
US Fish & Wildlife Service

American Indian Tribes:

Hopi Tribe
Kaibab Paiute Tribe

