

DRAFT
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
FOR THE
PROPOSED NORTHERN BORDER REMOTE RADIO LINK PILOT PROJECT ESSEX AND
ORLEANS COUNTIES, VERMONT

NAME OF PROPOSED ACTION

Proposed Northern Border Remote Radio Link Pilot Project Essex and Orleans Counties, Vermont, U.S. Border Patrol's (USBP) Laguna Niguel Sector, California

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

The Proposed Action includes the installation, operation, and maintenance of a Remote Radio Link Pilot Project along the U.S./Canada International border west of Norton, Vermont. The project consists of the installation of a buried fiber-optic communication system within the International boundary, known as the Slash. The cable is proposed to be installed using a cable plow, trenchers, rock cutters, and directional drilling equipment and would extend for approximately 7 miles westward beginning about 1.5 miles west of the Norton Port of Entry. Three existing two-track access routes currently used as skidder trails would be improved to provide project access. Equipment and material would be staged during the installation phase at the existing Sugar Barn in a disturbed area that is routinely used for logging and syrup production equipment. In addition, electrical power is available at the Sugar Barn and would be used to power the fiber optic cable.

Alternative 1: Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative.

Under the No Action Alternative, installation of the proposed Remote Radio Link Pilot Project would not occur and current practices and procedures would continue. Communication and situational awareness would not be enhanced within the Newport Station and Beecher Falls Station's AOR. The operational efficiency (interdiction of illegal intruders) and effectiveness of the USBP would not be enhanced or understood by the data resulting from the pilot project.

Alternative 2: Alternative 2 is the Full Build Alternative.

The Full Build Alternative would be implemented, as described above, along the entire 7-mile corridor.

Alternative 3: Alternative 3 is the Limited Build Alternative (Preferred Alternative)

The Limited Build Alternative would involve installation of the cable as described above, but the cable on the western side of Line Pond would be eliminated. The total length of cable under the Limited Build Alternative would be approximately 5.5 miles. The shorter amount of cable would still provide valuable information regarding the efficacy of the system and data collected from the pilot project could be used in developing similar projects in other regions of the United States. The Preferred Alternative would result in less costs and reduced impacts on the environment.

ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:

Physical Environment: There would not be a permanent loss of soils and no effect on prime or unique soils associated with either of the action alternatives. Additionally, no subsurface geologic features would be impacted.

Although there are potentially jurisdictional wetlands and waters of the U.S. along the project corridor, specific Best Management Practices (BMPS) would be implemented to avoid impacts to these resources. Specifically, directional drilling would be used at all stream crossings and major wetland areas, and specialized ground protection matting would be employed in order to distribute the weight of heavy equipment. Neither the Full Build Alternative nor the Limited Build Alternative would have impacts on flows within the floodplain. No long-term water quality impact would be expected.

The emissions generated during the installation activities would not be expected to exceed Federal *de minimis* thresholds due to the short-term and sporadic use of heavy equipment.

Natural Environment: Vegetative habitat disturbance would be negligible and occur primarily along the three 2-track access routes. Vegetation within the Slash is currently maintained by the International Boundary Commission. All vegetation impacts would be short-term and the extant vegetation would be expected to re-establish. The wildlife habitat present in the project corridor is both locally and regionally common. Noise effects on wildlife populations would be temporary and negligible, occurring only during the installation activities, which would occur during daylight hours only. Temporary and discountable effects on Canada lynx and northern long-eared bats could occur. These potential effects would be further reduced by limiting installation activities to daylight hours only and ensuring that no potential roosts trees are removed along the two-track access routes.

Cultural Resources: Based on review of past investigations and the Archaeological Resources Assessment prepared for the Proposed Action, no historic properties are anticipated to be adversely affected under either Full Build Alternative or the Limited Build Alternative (Preferred Alternative).

Human Environment: No adverse direct impacts would occur on socioeconomics or environmental justice issues as a result of the Full Build Alternative or Limited Build Alternative. Installation of the cable would have temporary beneficial impacts on the region's economy due to temporary employment and sales taxes generated through the purchase of project-related items such as fuel and food. There are no residential areas or schools in the vicinity of the Proposed Action. The closest residences to the project corridor are approximately 0.4 mile away.

Cumulative Effects: Development proposed or planned throughout the Region of Influence would occur primarily within areas that are currently developed. Thus, neither alternative would create an adverse cumulative effect on cultural resources, soils and geologic features, wildlife habitat or populations, air or water quality, or socioeconomic conditions.

FINDING: Based on the results of the EA and the environmental design measures to be implemented, the proposed Action, CBP's preferred alternative, is not expected to have a significant effect on the environment. Therefore, no additional environmental documentation under NEPA is warranted, and the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is not required.

Director
Facilities Management and Engineering
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Date

Ruynard Singleton
Executive Director
U.S. Border Patrol
Program Management Office Directorate

Date