



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
COUNCIL ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

CHAIRMAN

July 26, 2002

The Honorable Gale Norton
Secretary of Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The Honorable Ann M. Veneman
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20585

Re: Energy Project Streamlining Task Force Recommendation – Protecting Power Lines from Wildfires

Dear Secretaries Norton, Veneman and Abraham:

The task force members, including representatives from your agencies, have identified this issue and suggested that I call it to your attention. The severe drought and fire conditions facing the Western U.S. have increased the possibility that electrical power suppliers may have to de-energize certain electrical transmission lines due to fire threat. Service provided by these lines may have to be interrupted in order to protect the integrity of the transmission line and to protect the citizens of the West and the environment.

Your agencies are already taking all steps needed to respond to fire and fire threat throughout the West. Part of that effort should be maintaining a reliable, safe and environmentally sound electrical transmission grid in these times of extraordinary drought and fire conditions. In order to protect the grid and provide a continuous service to the public, the Task Force recommends that the USDO, USDA and DOE identify key staff to coordinate this critical effort and take the following actions, if you have not done so already:

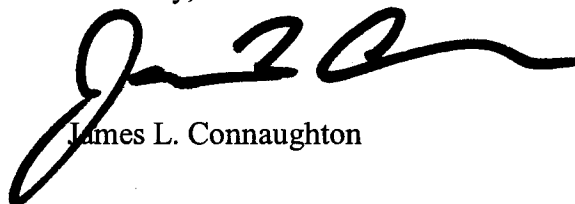
1. Notify permit holders of transmission line authorizations in areas of high/severe or extreme fire conditions to immediately assess the threat of potential wild fire to their transmission lines.
2. If a significant threat to a transmission line is identified, the permit holder should contact the authorized officer and jointly determine appropriate fire prevention and/or suppression actions.

3. Those fire prevention and suppression actions mutually agreed to should be implemented on a priority basis. It is the responsibility of the Federal Government to ensure that fire prevention and suppression activities associated with transmission lines located on lands administered by your Departments occur in the most appropriate fashion. Most fire prevention and suppression actions are already included in Right of Way "plans of development", "vegetation management plans", or "contingency plans" that are required as part of the transmission line authorization.

If the appropriate fire prevention and suppression actions are not included in the ROW authorizations, CEQ stands by to assist with these matters or provide NEPA guidance if necessary.

I appreciate your attention to these suggestions and I look forward to working with you on their implementation. Please contact V.A. Stephens at 202/395-0801 if we can be of further assistance

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J L Connaughton', written in a cursive style.

James L. Connaughton