

Porter Group Federal Activity Update Prepared for the City of Ely

June 9, 2022

FY23 Community Project Funding Requests

- While Congressman Horsford's office did not select any of the City's FY23 CPF submissions, Senators Cortez Masto and Rosen are still working with the Senate Appropriations Committee to develop their submission list for FY23 – this process will finish by the end of next week.
 - The Senator's office has informed Porter Group that it did submit to the subcommittee a portion of the City's four FY23 CPF requests, but they are waiting until the review period is over before identifying which ones.
 - We will know by the end of next week which projects the Senators have chosen.

FY22 CPF Funding

- Porter Group has learned that the City's FY22 CPF request for the Central Ely Sewer upgrade, which was enacted into law back in March, will be distributed by the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Pacific Southwest regional office directly to the City.
 - Because EPA is creating an entirely new grant program to facilitate its obligations to communities that received FY22 CPF funding for water infrastructure projects like Ely's, Porter Group was advised by the offices of Nevada's Senators that it will take several weeks or months before EPA is ready to work with municipalities to distribute their CPFs.
 - Porter Group is working with EPA to prepare for the CPF acquisition process to the greatest extent possible in order to ensure the City is well-prepared to accept the funding to which it has been entitled by law and will update the City as necessary, following further guidance from EPA.

William Bee Ririe Hospital Housing Project

- While Porter Group continues to work with the City to advocate for an ARPA allocation from the Governor's office for this project, it is also exploring federal funding possibilities that the City may pursue at the same time.
 - To assist with this effort, Porter Group is working with the Nevada League of Cities to identify and connect with stakeholder communities around Ely with which to partner in this endeavor to present the strongest case possible to the federal agencies administering grant programs relevant to this project.
 - The League and Porter Group will also work to identify state-level entities, such as the USDA's Rural Development office for Nevada, with which to engage to better understand the types of federal funding available for this project and how best to approach the administration when applying for such funding.
 - This month, Porter Group shared the US. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA) and the Small Business Administration's (SBA) newly-released Rural Resource Guide with both the City and the League, which will guide Porter Group and the League's advocacy on this project and other initiatives the City has which would benefit from federal funding.
 - The USDA and SBA's resource guide outlines federal funding opportunities for rural communities across the entirety of the federal government on subjects such as infrastructure investment, economic development, healthcare, and other areas of interest to the City.
 - The partnership between these two agencies extends beyond this dense but informative document, and Porter Group and the League are currently evaluating this opportunity and others to determine where and how to direct the City's efforts to ensure timely and efficient success in acquiring federal funding for the WBRH housing project and other projects as determined by the Ely City Council.

Nevada Northern Railway Infrastructure Investment Priorities

- The Porter Group continues to work with Nevada Northern Railway Foundation President Mark Bassett to identify and apply for Federal funding opportunities within the Department of Transportation's Federal Railroad Administration to facilitate various grade-crossing safety

enhancements and track improvement projects on various sections of track located in and around Ely, Nevada.

- Some of the opportunities currently being evaluated by Mr. Bassett and the Porter Group would assist with expanding rail service to additional communities in Northern Nevada.
- These opportunities will be released over the next six months, and Porter Group is working with Congressional committee staff to identify individuals within the Dept. of Transportation that can help guide our efforts to pursue Federal funding to those opportunities most suited to the Foundation's needs.

John Charchalis Public Comment

RESERVOIR STORAGE 4,100 ACRE FEET

1 ACRE FOOT = 43,000 cu.ft

$4,100 \times 43,000 = 176,300,000$ cu.ft.

1 cu.ft = 7.481 GALLONS

$176,300,000 \times 7.481$ GALLONS

1,318,900,300 GALLONS
PUMPED OUT OF THE AQUIFER

YEARLY LOSS FROM EVAPORATION 750 ACRE FT MAX

241,262,250 GALLONS
THAT MUST BE REPLENISHED YEARLY
FROM THE SAME SOURCE

ENERGY REQUIRED TO PUMP WATER TO THE
UPPER RESERVOIR

1.02 KILOWATT HOUR TO LIFT ONE ACRE FEET
OF WATER ONE FOOT IN HEIGHT

$1,020 \text{ WATTS} \times 4,100 = 4,182,000$ WATTS
AT 100% EFFICIENCY

MAX VERTICAL HEIGHT 2,150 FEET

$2,150 \times 4,182,000$ WATTS

8,991,300,000 WATTS TOTAL

REQUIRED TO RAISE 4,100 ACRE FEET 2,150 HEIGHT

OR 8,991.3 MEGAWATTS TO PUMP
THE WATER TO THE UPPER RESERVOIR
@ 100% EFFICIENCY

NEVADA NORTHERN RAILWAY

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



Nevada Northern Railway Foundation

A Nevada 501 (c) 3 Non-Profit Corporation

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May 18, 2022

The Honorable Kimberly D. Bose
Secretary Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20426

Re: P-14581, White Pine Pumped Storage Project – Comments on February 17, 2022, Draft License Application (DLA)

The Nevada Northern Railway (NNRy or Railway) Foundation (Foundation) submits these comments to express its serious concerns regarding the above-referenced Gridflex Energy, LLC (Gridflex or Applicant) pumped storage project (Project) and the incomplete studies and lack of studies Gridflex has prepared and proposed addressing impacts of the Project P-14851 on the Railway, a National Historic Landmark. The Gridflex studies prepared so far have not adequately addressed the Foundation's ongoing preservation efforts, the impact on our NNRy operations and the economic impact on tourism in White Pine County. The Foundation therefore requests that FERC direct Gridflex to properly complete and/or initiate the following studies before their draft license application (DLA) proceeds:

- Cultural Resources Study.
- Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study.
- Recreation Resources Study.
- Nevada Northern Railway Visitor Use and Experience Study.
- A Socioeconomic Impact Study.
- A Study on the Impact of the Current Megadrought on the Reliability of the Proposed Project.

In the Foundation's April 9, 2021, comments to Gridflex, for example, when Gridflex had submitted their study plans for review, the Foundation had asked Applicant to expand their Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study, Cultural Resources Study, and Recreation Resources Study to address the Foundation's various concerns. Gridflex never made those requested study improvements. As more details of the Project have become available, the Foundation's unease regarding the Project have increased.

The Foundation's various concerns arise mainly from Applicant's proposal to construct and insert their significant Project infrastructure between and in the line of sight of the rights-of-way of two of the Railway's tracks. The HiLine track has been used by the Foundation since it started tourism excursion trains thirty-five years ago. The Foundation has plans underway to restore the Mainline tracks and has received a \$10,168,421 grant from Southern Nevada Public Lands Management (SNPLMA) for this Mainline expansion and improvement. Opening the Mainline will allow NNRy excursion trains to reach

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Best Adrenalin Rush in Rural Nevada - 2020

Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence – 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014

Best Museum in Rural Nevada – 2020, 2017, 2016, 2014, 2013, 2010, 2009, 2008

Best Place to Take the Kids in Rural Nevada - 2020, 2019, 2018, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007

the historic McGill Depot opening valuable new recreational and economic opportunities for both the Foundation and the community of McGill.

Under their Project, Gridflex would place the lower storage reservoir between our two tracks. Moreover, the Project's tunnel portal, substation, access route, and transmission lines would all be visible from the two tracks compromising our Railway passengers' experience. The pristine viewshed currently enjoyed by our passengers would likely be spoiled by a power generation project that is poorly conceived and studied. The outcome is not difficult to image: the Project could fatally damage the economic health of the Foundation and the McGill community.

Cultural Resources Study

The NNRy is deeply concerned that the development of the White Pine Pumped Storage Project near the NNRy's track will have an adverse effect on the Railroad, which has special protections under Section 106 of the NHPA, as amended.

Nevada Northern Railway complex is a National Historic Landmark. National Historic Landmark status is the highest honor that the federal government can bestow on an historic site. National Historic Landmarks are so designated because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating and interpreting the heritage of the United States. Other National Historic Landmarks include Independence Hall, the Library of Congress and the United States Naval Base, Pearl Harbor. In furtherance of the Foundation's mission to interpret the impact of the railroad and railroading on White Pine County and our National Historic Landmark designation the Foundation operates excursion trains on the Mainline and the HiLine.

From the 1850's until the early 1900's, gold and silver discoveries occurred throughout Nevada. Legendary towns boomed. Rich mines were developed. And storied railroads were built to serve these towns and mines. Ely, the county seat of White Pine County, was the site of one of the last major booms in Nevada.

The White Pine County boom is exceptional, however. Here the towns in the county benefitting from the boom still exist: the mine is still producing copper ore and the Railway still operates. The NNRy demonstrates what it took to move a mountain of copper ore, just as it has for nearly a century. The Railway is the "real McCoy".

The Railway brings people from around the world to White Pine County. The original locomotives couple up to the original cars. Passengers purchase their tickets at the original depot ticket office and board their trains. The trains take them out on the original Mainline and HiLine tracks. Repairs are made to the original buildings using the original tools. It is that living and operating time capsule that is recognized as a National Historic Landmark.

The Mainline was built in 1906. The Foundation's success in receiving the SNPLMA grant to restore the railroad's Mainline will allow NNRy to restore service and once again access the historic McGill Depot. The Foundation has saved that building from collapse and has been restoring it. Rehabilitating the track to McGill will allow the Foundation to build upon past successes and develop new opportunities and programs to continue to bring tourists to White Pine County.

These existing and future Railway experiences are at now threatened and at risk of being damaged irreparably by the proposed Project.

The NNRy is concerned that the Project will adversely impact the Railway for other reasons as well involving our popular astro-tourism program. The NNRy has built a strong and successful astro-tourism program in partnership with the rangers from Great Basin National Park. We use the HiLine branch for our astro-tourism programs.

Support for these programs has been very strong. The Great Basin Star Train sells out a year in advance. The White Pine Tourism and Recreation Board granted funds to build a Star platform on the HiLine. Our astro-tourism programs take advantage of our area's unique dark skies. What started as a once-a-month event has grown to an event that occurs three times a week from mid-May to mid-September. Our astro-tourism programs produce a sizeable revenue stream for not only the Railway but also for the general community.

Because the program takes place in the evening and 99% of the participants are from outside White Pine County, the tourists who ride our astro-tourism trains spend the night in White Pine County. These tourists have a sizeable financial impact to the community.

How the Project will impact the current dark skies astro-tourism program is presently completely unknown. It is literally a "black hole" in the study. The Project's impact is not mentioned at all in the proposed study plan and needs to be properly addressed.

Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study

The Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study Report includes only two photo simulations along the NNRy's HiLine. Yet, the Applicant states that their Assess Visual Condition or Scenic Integrity of the Photo simulated Project Facilities, "...will describe the degree of existing visual contrast or existing scenic integrity of the Project facilities when viewed from a road or use area (including recreational facility) in terms of form, line, color, and texture, as well as proximity, extent, duration, and aspect of viewing."

The two simulations contained in the report are insufficient for a project of this magnitude. The NNRy's HiLine and Mainline railroad tracks should receive the same scrutiny given to roads as described in section 4.2.4 of the study report.

The study is inadequate for other reasons as well. The \$10,168,421 SNPLMA grant to the Railway enables the Foundation to restore the railroad's Mainline from Ely through the proposed Project boundary to McGill. This grant allows NNRy to build upon past successes and develop new opportunities and programs to continue to bring tourists to White Pine County. These and other related improvements would be directly impacted by the proposed Project. The rehabilitation of the Mainline is not addressed by Gridflex at all in its study.

Gridflex should be required to include photo simulations that cover both the HiLine and Mainline railroad tracks. The photo simulations of the proposed Project facilities should include what the NNRy's passengers will see from the train to include the tunnel portal, substation, access route, and transmission lines along the train's routes. The photo simulations of proposed Project facilities should be done every 660 feet along the HiLine and the Mainline. Furthermore, these photo simulations should be 360 degrees in scope and show the views during the day and at night. We are especially concerned about the impact the Project facilities will have on our night skies.

The current photo simulation on the White Pine Pumped Storage Project website of what passengers will see from the train of the lower reservoir is particularly misleading. The simulation shows an idyllic pond with water in it, without any fencing or lighting. Our concern is with view of the lower reservoir during the day when water will be at its bottom level and reveal a red-stained basin. Additionally, other projects of this type are fenced, typically including barbed wire fencing. Another concern is if the pond will be lighted at night. The combination of low water

levels, barbed wire fences and lights will dramatically change the view our passengers will see from the train.

Another issue that needs to be addressed in the photo simulations is the access road to the upper reservoir. In the original plan, the access road was to be located on the Duck Creek side of the mountain. It now appears that the access road will be on the railroad side of the mountain. To reach the upper reservoir, the road will require major switchbacks on the mountain's face. The Foundation is also concerned that this new access road route may be lighted and how that could affect the Railroad passenger experience.

In short, the study now shows only two photo simulations along the Railway's Hi Line, neither of which offers a near field direct line of site of the Project's infrastructure. The study also does not address the rehabilitation of the Mainline and the Project's impact on the reopening of the railroad operations along this route.

Recreation Resources Study

The Applicant's study plan states the following in regard to recreation:

Construction of the Project may have the potential to affect recreation facilities, resources, and opportunities in the vicinity of the Project through infrastructure development, increased noise, artificial lighting, traffic, or dust conditions and through potential interruption of service on and relocation of a segment of the Nevada Northern Railway HiLine Branch in Steptoe Valley. The goal of this Recreation Resources Study is to document existing recreation facilities, resources, and use in the Project vicinity to determine baseline conditions for a Project impact analysis.

The objectives of this study are to:

- Prepare an inventory of existing recreation facilities, resources, and opportunities in the Project vicinity, including use estimates; and*
- Analyze the potential effects of Project operation on existing recreation facilities, resources, and opportunities in the Project vicinity, including the Nevada Northern Railway (NNR) scenic train rides."*

The Project will change and have a major impact on the area, especially the NNRy and its operations. Applicant's Project, moreover, will affect recreation in the area as the Applicants acknowledge when they state, *"There are currently no developed recreation facilities located in areas likely to be affected by Project construction. However, the NNR HiLine Branch traverses these areas; while not a recreation facility per se, the HiLine Branch accommodates recreational excursion train rides."*

The Railway has developed recreational facilities within the study area. The largest is the Star Platform, which we just doubled in size in 2021. The Star Platform serves as an anchor for our very popular astro-tourism programs.

This popularity of astro-tourism has increased the number trains that utilize this area to three a week, with a possible further increase projected for 2023. Additionally, the NNRy is anticipating using the Star Platform for non-train related astro-tourism programming. It is envisioned that

tourists would convoy out to the Star Platform in their vehicles to participate in a “Dark Skies” program.

Additionally, the Railway is creating a new recreational program that utilizes the parallel service road as a bike trail. In cooperation with and in support of the White Pine County Tourism and Recreation Board, the NNRy will premier “Rails-to-Trails” in 2022. This program will allow bicyclists to take their bicycle on the Railway’s train to the end of the HiLine. Once there, the bicyclists will get off the train and ride their bicycles back to Ely. We expect this to be a very popular program.

The Project’s Resource Study Plan does not properly address the effects the Project could have on these various recreational activities. But that is not the only problem with this study.

The Applicant’s Resource Study Plan is also flawed because it relies on out-of-date information on the use of the HiLine. This flaw is reflected in the following statement:

Excursions depart from the depot in Ely throughout the year. Most trips head southwest through two tunnels and up mountain grades through Robinson Canyon toward the Ruth Copper Mining District. A few trains each month head north out the Steptoe Valley on the HiLine Branch toward McGill and the Primary Facility Corridors.

This statement is wrong. Relying on stale information, the report ignores recent important recreational developments involving the railroad. The astro-tourism programs and the new Rails-to-Trails program has led to increased use of the HiLine Branch three to four times a week, with additional trains programmed for 2023. The Project’s flawed Resource Study Plan also omits any discussion of another one of the Railway’s recreational initiatives. The NNRy is in the process of developing an electric railbike program to use the HiLine Branch. This program will rent electric-assisted railbikes to the public to operate on the HiLine branch. The HiLine branch was chosen for this program because of its views and remoteness. A pilot program is being developed for 2022. It is anticipated that the program will be a success and that the program will expand in 2023 to daily operations on the HiLine branch.

Nevada Northern Railway Visitor Use and Experience Study

The Applicant did not conduct the NNRy Visitor Use and Experience Study. The Applicant decided that due to the lack of concurrence on the existing survey instrument and the schedule for availability of photo simulations, they would did not implement the NNRy visitor survey.

Because of that decision, the DLA provides no details on visitor use and experiences of NNRy passengers on the HiLine who currently pass through the proposed Project boundary on NNRy excursions. Similarly, the DLA provides little information on how Project construction activities would impact visitor experience as well as train operations.

The Applicant only acknowledges in the DLA that “potential effects on the experiences of passengers on NNR HiLine train rides may occur due to construction and operation of the Project, including potential effects on dark skies from Project lighting...The Project also has the potential to modify the landscape and scenery visible from the NNRy train rides on the HiLine.” This statement is highly misleading. At the very least, it does not address NNRy’s reopening of the Ely to McGill route on the Mainline that is in the initial stages of development, which would also be impacted by the proposed Project.

The Applicant claims that the effects of potentially modified scenery were identified through the Visual and Aesthetic Resource Study. But that study is seriously flawed. It was conducted in such a way that the Project facilities were “imperceivable” due to their distance from the study’s key observation points (KOPs). As previously discussed, the Applicant performed no photo simulation of what the Project facilities, tunnel portal, substation, access route, and transmissions lines would look like as the train passes through the Project Boundary.

The Applicant has recently indicated to the BLM that they would be adjusting the project proposal to access the upper reservoir location from the Steptoe Valley side (J. Bybee, BLM Ely District, personal communication, April 29, 2022), which is where NNRy’s HiLine and Main Line are located. This would entail building an access road that crosses NNRy tracks and includes a series of switchbacks across the face of the mountain that would likely be visible to the NNRy passengers. Construction of this access road could also interfere with the railroad’s Dark Skies programing if nighttime construction occurs and requires lighting.

A major point that the Applicant has also not addressed is the disposal of waste rock generated from the Project that could result in additional visual impacts for NNRy passengers. Every cubic unit of rock that is removed from the Projects tunnels and generating station will create 1.5 to 2 cubic units of waste rock. The DLA does not provide details on where the waste rock resulting from tunnelling activities would be stored and if the storage area would be visible from the HiLine and Main Line.

While the DLA discloses the number of Star Trains and the number of Sunset, Stars, and Champagne Trains NNR operated in 2021 (18 and 35 respectively), the total number of passengers on these trains is not set out. No information is provided on other trains operated on the HiLine, such as the Valley Vista Train. The Applicant states that they plan to use information from their Recreation Resource Study to assess the socioeconomic effects of the Project, but this information was not collected. This information is essential in determining the impacts of Project construction and operation on the economic contributions provided by NNRy tourism to the city of Ely and White Pine County.

As the main tourism attraction in the city of Ely, the disruptions to operating trains along the HiLine over the 6-year expected Project construction phase and the long-term changes to visitor experiences on those tracks could lead to major economic impacts to the local area. In a recent proposal for funding to expand astro-tourism along the HiLine, NNR estimates the 2021 contribution of the Star Train and Sunset, Stars, & Champagne Train as follows:

“In 2021 we will operate 47 astro-tourism trains from mid-May to mid-September that will carry approximately 2,700 passengers. Since these trains operate in the late evening, 100% of these passengers will stay overnight in Ely generating over 1,300 room nights in our community. The estimated economic impact of our astro-tourism trains to the community is estimated currently at \$724,680 annually. The success of these trains led to the creation of two full time positions here at the railroad. (NNR 2021)”

Even this estimate does not take into consideration the planned reopening of the Mainline, which will afford passengers extended day trips from Ely to McGill, a historic community that is undergoing major renovations to increase tourism. While the Applicant conducted a socioeconomic analysis of the Project’s impacts on the local economy, the economic effects on tourism resulting from disrupting NNRy operations and visitor experiences was not included in the study.

Socioeconomic Impact Study

While the Applicant included the results of a Socioeconomic Study in the DLA, this study does not provide any details on the economic contribution of tourism related to NNRy trains, which is essential in

assessing both short-term impacts (during the 6-year construction period) and long-term impacts (during Project operation) that the Project would have on NNRy economic contributions to the local economy.

As a result, the DLA does not provide information needed to evaluate the impacts of the proposed Project on visitor numbers and experiences on NNRy train rides or the effects of the Project on short-term and long-term economic contributions stemming from NNRy operations. The NNRy has concerns about the development of the White Pine Pump Storage project that have not been addressed by the developer of the project.

The NNRy is located in Ely Nevada in White Pine County. Ely is a remote, rural incorporated city that is the county seat. Its remoteness is illustrated by a Nevada Department of Transportation highway warning sign heading west out of Ely that states, "Next Gas 164 miles." The nearest cities located to Ely are equally distant: Las Vegas, Nevada and Salt Lake City, Utah, are both 240 miles away. Ely is not located on an interstate highway, nor does it have any scheduled air service.

The NNRy has been operating tourist trains in this remote location for the past thirty-five years. During that time, the railroad has attracted visitors from around the world and across the country. Approximately a half million tourists have visited the railroad, and of those, over a third of a million have ridden the train.

The economic impact of tourism attributed to the railroad in White Pine County is estimated to be \$144,700,000. This number was calculated using Travel Nevada's tourist spending research. Travel Nevada is the State of Nevada's statewide tourism authority.

The reason that tourists make the (minimum) four-hour drive to Ely to visit the Railway is its distinctiveness. The railroad is a time capsule; it's commonly been said that 'it appears that the workers went to lunch and never came back'. And for the most part that is true, the railroad shut down rather suddenly in 1983. There had been other shutdowns of the railroad in the past and some of the railroad's workers thought that it would reopen again, leaving their work clothes in their locker. Regrettably, this time the railroad shutdown for good.

The development of the Project has many unknowns. One of the biggest unknowns is the impact of the Project on the NNRy's visitation. The NNRy is self-funded. The majority of our revenue comes from our tourist excursion trains. People travel from hundreds -- if not thousands of miles -- to experience this historic railroad. The railroad has been featured in the Washington Post, the New York Times, VIA Magazine, the Los Angeles Times, Travel + Leisure, Travel Pulse, Trailer Life, and Conde Nast Traveler in Spain. The railroad's astro-tourism trains have been featured on CBS Sunday Morning, as well as in the CBS This Morning series American Wonders series. We have appeared in four episodes of Pawn Stars, seven episodes of American Restoration, and an episode of the Big Bang Theory.

A common theme in all this publicity is the unspoiled vistas, dark skies and the preserved history of the Nevada Northern Railway National Historic Landmark. This common theme has allowed the NNRy to grow economically. In the past thirty-five years we have gone from four employees to twenty-two employees with an annual payroll of over \$1,000,000 annually. Last year, 2021 was the largest year the NNRy has ever experienced in visitation and revenue.

A Socioeconomic Study needs to be completed to measure the impacts of the possible loss of the attributes that cause people to travel to this remote corner of rural Nevada. Bluntly, our concern is that the Project's adverse impacts will degrade our visitor experience. The ramifications of a degraded visitor experience could lead to decreased visitation. The consequence of a drop in visitation would lead to a reduction of income for the NNRy, which in turn would lead to employee layoffs. In short, a degraded

visitor experience could be the start of a cascading event that would undermine the thirty-five years of hard work and effort to preserve the Nevada Northern Railway National Historic Landmark.

Study on the Impact of the Current Megadrought on the Reliability of the Proposed Project

The purpose of the Project is to serve as a energy storage 'battery' that will release its energy potential during periods of peak power demand. The proposed energy storage relies on water flowing from the upper to the lower reservoir to create the electricity to feed into the grid during peak power demand periods.

The Applicants propose to build their Project in the high desert of rural Nevada in Steptoe Valley. The Steptoe Valley aquifers that are proposed as the pumping site(s) are replenished by run-off from north-south running mountains on both sides of the aquifer site(s). Years ago, the aquifers were shallow, but healthy. Circumstantial evidence suggests that is no longer the case. Long term residents of the area are observing formerly vigorous groves of trees are now dying. There are news stories almost daily describing the severe impact of the drought on Lake Powell and Lake Mead. Based on this anecdotal evidence, it is reasonable to conclude that the level of the aquifers in Steptoe Valley are also receding because of the drought in the West and global warming.

A recent study has pointed out that an exceptionally dry year in 2021 pushed the 22-year-long drought being experienced in the western United State to the top of the record books. The searing "megadrought" that has gripped the southwest U.S. for more than two decades is the driest 22-year period in at least 1,200 years. The region hasn't seen a more severe drought since the start of the scientific record around the year 800, according to newly published research.¹ A shortage of water locally will have calamitous effort on the community. But whether the existing aquifers can support the water needs of both the local community and the proposed Project is completely unknown.

Summary

The Nevada Northern Railway Foundation is concerned about the various significant adverse impacts the proposed White Pine Pumped Storage Project P-14851 will have on the Railway's operations and its future, as well as the adverse impacts of the Project on the economic health of the local community. These concerns need to be addressed fully and properly in the studies presented. As discussed more fully above, the Project reports do not include the fulsome discussion that is required.

Sincerely,



Mark S. Bassett

President

Nevada Northern Railway Foundation

1. Williams, A.P., Cook, B.I. & Smerdon, J.E. Rapid intensification of the emerging southwestern North American megadrought in 2020–2021. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 12, 232–234 (2022). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-022-01290-z>

NEVADA NORTHERN RAILWAY

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



Nevada Northern Railway Foundation

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June 2, 2022

The Honorable Kimberly D. Bose
Secretary, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20426

Terry Turpin
Director, Office of Energy Projects
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
888 First Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20426

RE: White Pine Pumped Storage Project (P-14851) -- Nevada Northern Railway Foundation Response in Support of National Park Service 18 CFR § 16.8(b)(6) Request

Dear Secretary Bose and Director Turpin:

The Nevada Northern Railway (NNRy or Railway) Foundation (Foundation) submits this Response in support of the National Park Service (NPS) request filed May 18, 2022, for a study dispute resolution pursuant to 18 CFR § 16.8(b)(6) (Study Dispute Request) relating to the licensing of the White Pine Pumped Storage Project (P-14851).¹ As discussed by the NPS and in the various comments submitted in connection with this matter, including in the Foundation's May 18, 2022, comments, the Applicant, White Pine Waterpower, LLC has not prepared and completed necessary studies to determine the proposed Project's impact on the NNRy, a National Historic Landmark.

The NPS and Foundation have explained that Applicant's draft license application (DLA) has important data gaps and other deficiencies that must be rectified to show the complete Project impacts on overall NNRy visitor use and experiences. Despite threatening current and future visitor experiences with potentially devastating short- and long-term impacts, the Applicant has either failed or insufficiently studied the Project's impacts, among other things, on:

- Railway visitors' visual experiences. Applicant's Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study Report presently only includes two photo simulations along the Railway's HiLine, neither of which offers a near field direct line of site of the Project's infrastructure. Applicant should be required to prepare and include photo

¹ The Foundation asks the Commission for any required waivers of its regulations that may be necessary to permit this Response.

Award Winning Destination

Best Adrenalin Rush in Rural Nevada - 2020

Trip Advisor Certificate of Excellence – 2020, 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014

Best Museum in Rural Nevada – 2020, 2017, 2016, 2014, 2013, 2010, 2009, 2008

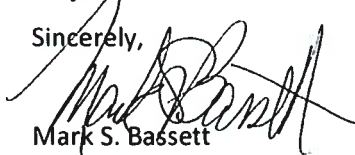
Best Place to Take the Kids in Rural Nevada - 2020, 2019, 2018, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, 2008, 2007

simulations that cover both the HiLine and Mainline railroad tracks showing what passengers will see from the train day and night, every 660 feet, and 360 degrees in scope.

- The Foundation's \$10,168,421 Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act (SNPLMA) grant, approved by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior in October 2021, to restore the railroad's Mainline from Ely through the proposed Project boundary to McGill that will open new economic opportunities for both the Foundation and the community of McGill. The rehabilitation of the Mainline is not addressed at all in Applicant's Visual and Aesthetic Resources Study.
- How the Project will affect the Railway's Dark Skies Astro-tourism program, which has been operating on a sold-out basis in partnership with rangers from Great Basin National Park. The Project's impact is not mentioned at all in the Cultural Resources Study.
- How the Project will affect recent important recreational developments involving the railroad. The Project's Resource Study plan, for example, relies on stale information on the use of the HiLine. The study plan also does not include sufficient information discussing Project impacts on: the increasingly popular Astro-tourism programs; the Foundation's expanded bicycling programs utilizing the railroad and its parallel service road as a new bike riding trail; and plans underway to introduce an electric railbike program using the HiLine Branch.
- How the Project will affect the economic contribution of tourism on a short- or long-term basis related to Foundation trains. Applicant did not provide a Socioeconomic Study Plan. This plan needs to be performed to measure thoroughly the Project impacts on the range of attributes that cause people to travel to an isolated area of Nevada to experience the unique Railway experience.
- Whether the Project will interfere with the Railway's senior right-of-way. Applicant has recently indicated to the BLM that changes to the Project would be made involving building an access road that crosses NNRy tracks and includes switchbacks in the Steptoe Valley mountain side visible to Railway passengers.
- Whether existing aquifers can support the water needs of both the local community and the Project.

For all these reasons, the Foundation supports the NPS Study Dispute Request and asks the Commission to direct Applicant to conduct and complete the required studies so that a full understanding and proper review of the Project can occur.

Sincerely,



Mark S. Bassett

President

Nevada Northern Railway Foundation

Cc: White Pine Waterpower, LLC (Messrs. Luiga Resta, Matthew Shapiro)
Affected/participating agencies and Indian tribes