

**Finding of No Significant Impact  
for  
Glass Mountain Tower  
Proposed 480-foot Guyed Telecommunications Tower  
Approximately 27 Miles Northeast of Marathon, Brewster County, Texas**

**Introduction**

The Permian Basin Regional Planning Commission (PBRPC) proposes to replace a former communications tower, referred to as the Glass Mountain Tower, which was destroyed in an ice storm, with a 480-foot guyed telecommunications tower and associated equipment in Brewster County, Texas. The Glass Mountain Tower Environmental Assessment (EA) provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the use of grant funds issued by the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program, administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, to construct this facility.

**Scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA)**

The proposed Glass Mountain Tower would apply funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program. The PSIC Grant Program was developed to assist State, local, tribal, and non-governmental agencies in developing interoperable communications as they leverage the newly available spectrum in the 700 megahertz (MHz) band. As a condition of the PSIC Grant Program, grantees must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The NTIA has specified that PSIC grant funds must be used for projects that would improve communications in areas at high risk for natural disasters and in urban and metropolitan areas at high risk for terrorism threats and should include pre-positioning or securing of interoperable communications for immediate deployment during emergencies or major disasters. Investments receiving PSIC funds can range from the installation of new large-scale infrastructure (e.g., communications towers) to the acquisition of mobile / portable handheld radios. As outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA (February 2009) and Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) (April 2009), the proposed Glass Mountain Tower is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed project would allow for the following:

- Increase the coverage area for emergency responders connected through the system,
- Support new frequencies that would improve and expand voice and data coverage,
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations,
- Enhance security and facility control, and
- Use cost-effective measures via leasing agreements and systems sharing.

The EA examines the Proposed Action to replace a former communications tower, which was destroyed in an ice storm, with a 480-foot guyed communications tower and associated equipment within an existing 100-foot by 100-foot compound. The total ground disturbance would be less than 0.25 acres. The proposed location is a vacant parcel of an existing site that contains the remnants of the former communications tower. The area surrounding the proposed site is vacant, scrub brush located in the Glass Mountains of the Stockton Plateau in Brewster County, Texas. The area surrounding the site is mainly mountainous rangeland with a few rural residences. The Glass Mountain Tower EA analyzes existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action for 11 resource areas: noise, air quality, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, historic and cultural resources, aesthetic and visual resources, land use, infrastructure, socioeconomic resources, and human health and safety.

## Alternatives Considered

**Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative).** Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is to replace the damaged communications tower with a new 480-foot guyed telecommunications tower with associated equipment within the existing 100-foot by 100-foot fenced compound. The new tower would use the former communication tower footprint. The proposed site is a vacant piece of land with remnants of the former communications tower. The Proposed Action would also include acquisition and installation of a 12-foot by 16-foot equipment shelter, a standalone emergency backup generator and associated propane tank, and a control utility board. Total ground disturbance would be less than 0.25 acres. The existing power utilities would be extended from nearby overhead electrical transmission lines. An unpaved private road would be used for site access during construction and for operational maintenance. The proposed site topography provides natural height resulting in enhanced coverage. In addition, the facility would be constructed in a manner to allow for future expansion needs. The new tower within the proposed existing site would enhance facility and facility control, provide reliable interoperable communications, and significantly increase coverage for security and emergency service entities.

**No Action Alternative.** Under the No Action Alternative, the current radio system would not be met causing serious limitations on security and emergency response, funding for interoperable communications and information systems infrastructure would not be released, and existing infrastructure would neither be developed nor enhanced. No new activities at the Glass Mountain site would be funded with PSIC grant funding. It is assumed that the project proposed for PSIC grant funding would not go forward with alternative funding sources. The No Action Alternative would not address the needs for PBRPC, Brewster County, and surrounding areas. The No Action Alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of Alternative 1 in the Glass Mountain Tower EA.

## Alternatives Considered But Not Carried Forward

Multiple alternatives were examined to determine the range of reasonable alternatives to implement the Proposed Action. Alternatives considered included renovating the existing facility or repairing the damaged tower; however, both alternatives would require significant structural retrofitting that may not accommodate or support the equipment upgrades. These alternatives were not carried forward as they did not meet PBRPC and Brewster County's requirements.

## Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) to construct the proposed Glass Mountain Tower is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of the PBRPC to improve and facilitate reliable interoperable communications for Brewster County. The No Action Alternative would not address the communications needs for Brewster County and the surrounding areas.

## Consultations

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished through a preliminary review of protected species from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Endangered Species Web site to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed site. Based on a review of the USFWS Web site, 13 threatened or endangered species were identified in Brewster County, including three bird species: black-capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapilla*), northern aplomado falcon (*Falco femoralis septentrionalis*), and southwestern willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*); two fish species: Big Bend gambusia (*Gambusia gagei*) and Rio Grande silvery minnow (*Hybognathus amarus*); one mammal, the Mexican long-nosed bat (*Leptonycteris nivalis*); and seven flowering plants: Davis' green pitaya (*Echinocereus viridiflorus var. davisii*), Nellie cory cactus (*Coryphantha minima*), Terlingua Creek cat's-eye (*Cryptantha crassipes*), bunched cory cactus (*Coryphantha ramillosa*), Chisos Mountain hedgehog Cactus (*Echinocereus chisoensis var. chisoensis*), Hinckley oak (*Quercus hinckleyi*), and Lloyd's Mariposa cactus (*Echinomastus mariposensis*) that may

be located on or near the proposed site. In addition, three candidate species were identified in Brewster County, including one flowering plant: Guadalupe Mountain fescue (*Festuca ligulata*); one mollusk: Texas hornshell (*Popenaias popeii*); and one bird species: yellow-billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) that may be located on or near the proposed site. Habitats for these identified proposed or candidate species were compared to the habitat present at the proposed site; none of these habitats were identified as having a potential to be found at the proposed site. The proposed project would have “no effect” on protected species or their habitats. A consultation letter for cell tower projects was submitted to USFWS Austin Ecological Services Office. The USFWS provided instructions on August 19, 2005 that after completing a habitat evaluation or any necessary surveys, any tower projects determined to have “no effect” determination do not require coordination with the USFWS. USFWS concurrence with the conclusions of the Glass Mountain Tower EA that the Proposed Action has no effect on protected species or their habitats as none are present is assumed.

Additionally, the Texas legislature enacted a State ESA and authorized the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) to generate a species list for threatened or endangered with State-wide extinction. Unlike the Federal ESA, the State law does not provide habitat protection or regulation of indirect “takes” but does outlaw killing or maiming individuals of listed species and regulates other aspects such as trade and transportation. These State protected species are typically a development constraint if identified on a proposed site and directly impacted. The TPWD maintains a directory of State listed species by county; 139 additional State-listed species were identified as having some probability of occurrence in Brewster County. Most of these species were excluded from detailed analysis within the Glass Mountain Tower EA as their preferred habitats (e.g., coastal environments, large forests, steep slopes, grassy plains and valleys, freshwater habitats) were not present on or near the proposed site. The full list of State protected species and preferred habitats is provided in Appendix B of the Glass Mountain Tower EA (June 2010).

The Glass Mountain Tower EA identified one species, the Agave Glomeruliflora (*Chisos Agave*), with six to 20 known occurrences within 0.5 miles of the proposed site. The Agave Glomeruliflora is not Federally listed but has rare State status with no regulatory listing status. The species was first observed in 1947 and last observed in 1957. None of the known occurrences were traced to a specific location; the species was not observed on or near the proposed site.

Brewster County is located within a portion of the Central Flyway for migratory birds. Fall and spring migrants may use the region for temporary stops during travel between the northern and southern hemispheres. Best management practices should be implemented to avoid harassment and harm to migratory birds during construction activities. Construction impacts would be expected to have no significant impact on migratory birds as the use of construction-related equipment would occur during limited periods and would be considered short-term impacts.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished with the Texas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether the construction of the proposed tower may generate any short- or long-term indirect impacts to historic and cultural resources or may be located within the viewshed of any historic and cultural resources. An archaeological evaluation was conducted to assess the potential direct effects the Proposed Action may have on archaeological resources. Historic, cultural, or tribal resources were not identified at the proposed site or within a 1.5-mile area of potential effect (APE) based on a review of information available from the National Register of Historic Places, Texas SHPO, Texas Archaeological Site files, and the Texas Historic Commission – Site Atlas. No State surveyed historic places were located within the APE. A public notice was listed in the *Alpine Avalanche* on September 17, 2009 to allow for public comments related to the proposed project on historic properties within the viewshed of the proposed tower; no comments were received. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Form 620 with attachments was submitted to the Texas SHPO on October 23, 2009. The Texas SHPO response letter was received on November 13, 2009 concurring with the determination

that the Proposed Action would have no effect, no further evaluation would be required, and the project may proceed.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

The proposed project is not likely to result in any environmental impacts and does not involve any unusual risks or impacts to sensitive areas. The Proposed Action would require construction of a new 480-foot guyed communications tower with ground disturbance activities (totaling less than 0.25 acres). In accordance with 47 Code of Federal Regulations Section 1.1307(a) (1) through (8), an evaluation was made to determine whether any of the listed FCC special interest items would be significantly affected if a tower structure and associated equipment control cabinets were constructed at the proposed site location. No FCC special interest items were identified.

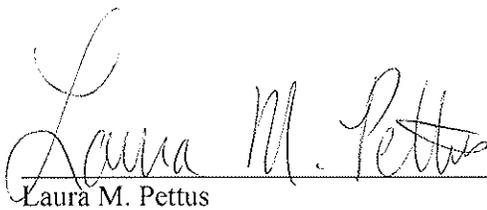
### **NTIA Review**

NTIA determined that the June 2010 Glass Mountain Tower EA accurately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed tower and associated equipment and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This FONSI is based on the attached Glass Mountain Tower EA (June 2010) that has been independently evaluated by the NTIA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the environmental issues and impacts of the proposed Project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the best available information and NTIA's independent review, NTIA has decided to adopt the Glass Mountain Tower EA (June 2010). The Glass Mountain Tower EA is available for public review at [http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA\\_sub3.html](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html). This FONSI has therefore been prepared and is being submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with NEPA. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

I have considered the information contained in the Glass Mountain Tower EA, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the Glass Mountain Tower EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the EA, will have no significant impact on the environment.



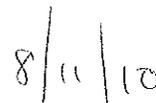
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Laura M. Pettus

Responsible Program Manager

Department of Commerce

National Telecommunications and Information Administration



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Date

## ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

**Description of proposal:** Glass Mountain Tower site

**Proponent:** Permian Basin Regional Planning Commission (PBRPC)

**Location of current proposal:** Glass Mountain, Brewster County, Texas

**Title of document being adopted:** Proposed 480-foot Guyed Telecommunications Tower  
Approximately 27 Miles Northeast of Marathon, Brewster County, Texas

**Agency that prepared document being adopted:** PBRPC

**Date adopted document was prepared:** June 2, 2010

**Description of document (or portion) being adopted:** The proposed Glass Mountain Tower would replace a former communications tower, which was destroyed in an ice storm, with a 480-foot guyed telecommunications tower with associated equipment within a 100-foot by 100-foot fenced compound. The new tower would use the former communication tower footprint. The existing site is a vacant piece of land with remnants of the former communications tower. The proposed Project would also include acquisition and installation of a 12-foot by 16-foot equipment shelter, a standalone emergency backup generator and associated propane tank, and a control utility board. The proposed site topography provides natural height resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 480-foot telecommunications tower.

Total ground-disturbance would be less than 0.25 acres. Existing electrical power utilities are present at the site and an existing access road would be used for construction and operational maintenance activities. The Proposed Action does not have any significant environmental impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

**The document is available to be read at:** [http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA\\_sub3.html](http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/NEPA_sub3.html)

**The Department of Commerce has identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for National Telecommunications and Information Administration's (NTIA) purposes after independent review. The document meets its environmental review needs for approval under the PSIC Grant Program and will accompany the proposal to the decision maker.**

**Name of agency adopting the document:** NTIA

**Contact person if other than responsible official:** N/A

**Responsible Official:** Laura M. Pettus

**Position/Title:** Responsible Program Manager

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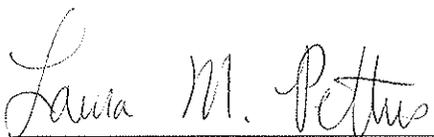
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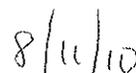
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