

APPENDIX C
BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

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BIOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT FOR FORT COLLINS TRANSMISSION LINE UPGRADE

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Biological Assessment is to review the Proposed Project in sufficient detail to determine if the action “may affect” any federally listed threatened, endangered, candidate, or proposed species. This Biological Assessment was prepared in accordance with the legal requirements set forth under Section 7 (c) of the Endangered Species Act (19 U.S.C) 1536.

Platte River Power Authority (Platte River) proposes to upgrade and/or rebuild portions of existing transmission lines in the vicinity of Fort Collins, Colorado and along an existing transmission line right-of-way (ROW) extending north from the city to the Rawhide Energy Station. Western Area Power Administration (Western) is the lead federal agency for the Proposed Project. The Proposed Project is described in the following section.

A list of the federally listed threatened and endangered species, those proposed for listing, and candidates potentially occurring in the Project Area was developed using the *Federally Listed and Candidate Species List for Colorado by County: Larimer County* as (USFWS 2000a) provided by the Colorado Field Office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in response to a request letter dated 9 August 2000, indicated that five threatened or endangered species and two candidate species may occur within the Project Area (Carlson 2000). **Table C-1** identifies the seven species under federal consideration and summarizes the potential for impacts to each species.

The species potentially occurring in the Project Area and addressed in this Biological Assessment include the bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), mountain plover (*Charadrius montanus*), black-tailed prairie dog (*Cynomys ludovicianus*), black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*), Preble's meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius preblei*), Ute ladies'-tresses orchid (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), and Colorado butterfly plant (*Gaura neomexicana* ssp. *coloradensis*).

Western and Platte River are committed to incorporating environmental protection measures during implementation of the Proposed Project to avoid affecting federally listed or candidate species and their habitat. Project-specific environmental protection measures to be implemented during construction activities include the following:

- Surveys for nesting mountain plovers will be conducted in compliance with the Mountain Plover Survey Guidelines (USFWS 1999b) if transmission line upgrade activities related to the Proposed Project are anticipated to occur in potential habitat between April 1 and July 31. No “pull sites” will be located in potential habitat before a survey is completed and no “pull sites” will be located in or near any known nesting locations between April 1 and July 31.
- Impacts to native vegetation will be minimized by the use of rubber-tired vehicles.
- Revegetation of disturbed areas will be implemented in the fall, using native seed mixes

and techniques approved by Larimer County and the City of Fort Collins.

- Sensitive areas within the Project Area have been identified and disturbances to these areas will be avoided. Sensitive areas include wetlands and woody riparian areas, which are potential habitat for Preble's mice, Ute ladies'-tresses orchids, and Colorado butterfly plants; and upland areas that contain prairie dog colonies and potential mountain plover habitat.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

Platte River proposes to add on, rebuild, and upgrade a portion of Platte River's and Western's Fort Collins Area transmission line in Larimer County. Platte River proposes to string a second 230kV line onto existing double-circuit structures at two locations: between the Rawhide Energy Station and the LaPorte Tap; and between the Timberline Substation and Poudre Substation (**Figure C-1**). In addition, Platte River proposes to rebuild and upgrade existing single-circuit 115kV wood pole lines to double-circuit lines designed for 230kV in two locations: between the LaPorte Tap and the Poudre Substation; and between the Poudre Substation and the Richards Lake Tap. All activities are proposed to take place within existing Platte River or Western rights-of-way.

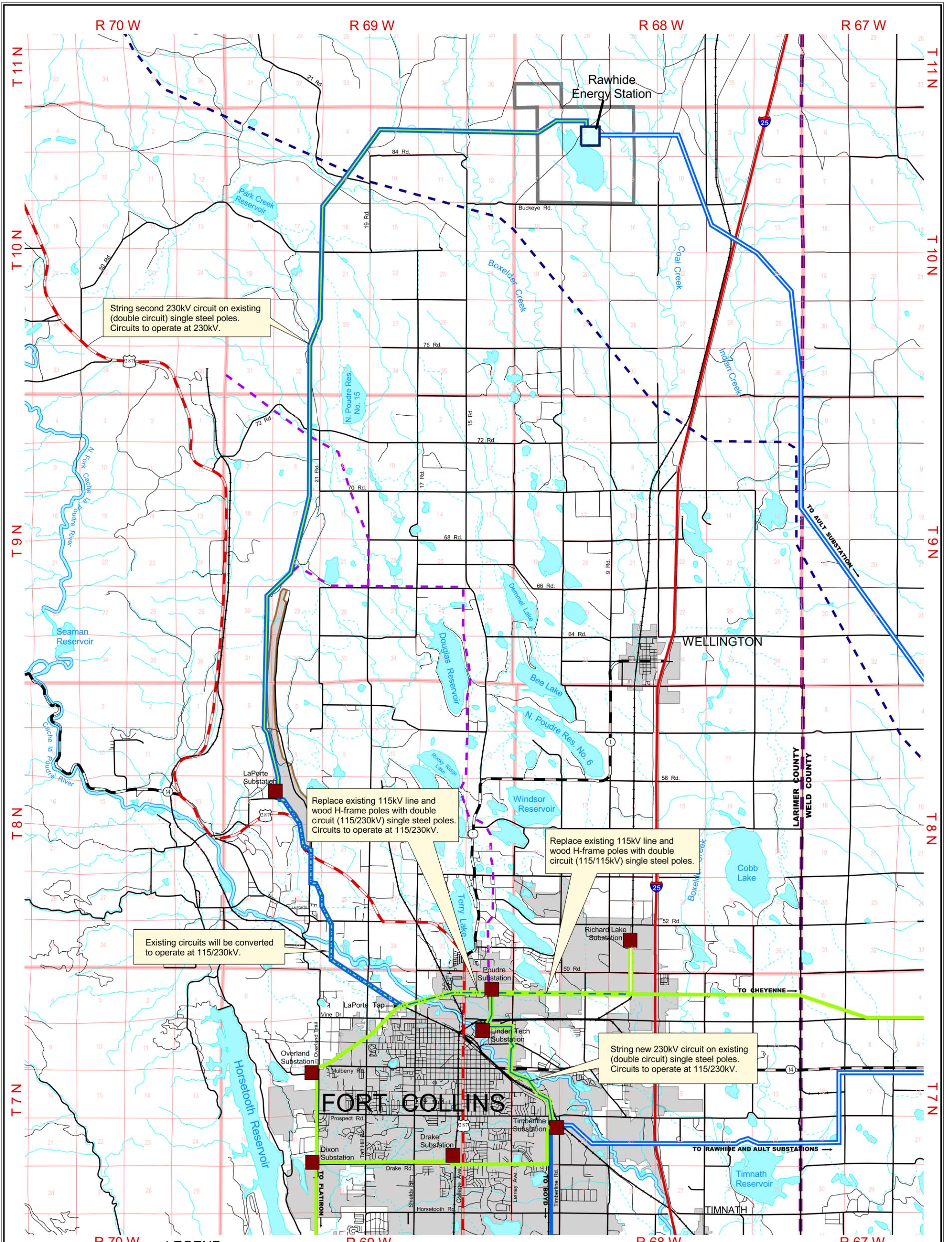
The present plan is to install approximately 80 megawatts of gas-fired peaking capacity at the Rawhide Energy Station by June 2002. The additional peaking generation will increase the installed net plant capacity at the Rawhide Energy Station to approximately 350 megawatts. System studies indicate that this additional generation will require an enhancement of Platte River's transmission system in the Fort Collins area.

A Platte River 230kV line from Rawhide Energy Station is strung on double-circuit towers that are routed to the southwest towards Platte River's LaPorte Substation. This existing 230kV line terminates at the LaPorte Substation in a 230/115kV step-down transformer. Platte River owns and operates the two 115kV lines from LaPorte, also strung on double-circuit towers, to the LaPorte Tap where the lines intersect Western's existing 115kV wood pole transmission line. One of these 115kV lines terminates at Platte River's Overland Trail Substation and the other terminates at Western's Poudre Substation.

Platte River's LaPorte Substation to LaPorte Tap double-circuit line was designed and constructed for eventual operation at 230kV. Platte River's double-circuit line from its Timberline Substation to Western's Poudre Substation also was designed for operation at 230kV on one circuit and 115kV on the other circuit. Presently only the 115kV circuit is strung.

Platte River is proposing to make improvements to its transmission system and to rebuild and upgrade Western's lines as follows:

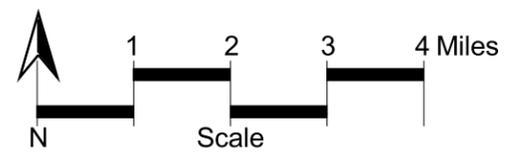
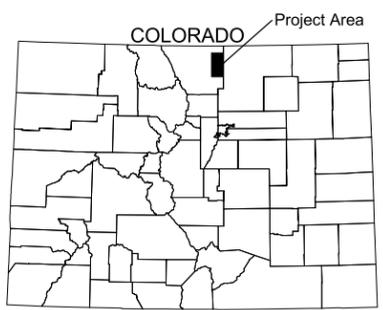
- (6) Platte River will string the second 230kV line on the double-circuit Rawhide Energy Station–LaPorte line. This second line will not terminate at the LaPorte Substation but, instead, will bypass it and will be connected to the upgraded line section described in item (2). This new 230kV line from Rawhide Energy Station will terminate in Platte River's 230kV switchyard at Timberline.



R 70 W R 69 W R 68 W R 67 W

LEGEND

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| | Rebuild Existing 115kV Single Circuit to 115kV Double Circuit | | US Interstate Highway |
| | Upgrade Existing 115kV Single Circuit to 115/230kV | | US Highway |
| | Rebuild Existing 115kV Single Circuit to 115/230kV | | State Highway |
| | Convert Existing 115kV Double Circuit to 115/230kV | | Primary Road |
| | Upgrade Existing 230kV Single Circuit to 230kV Double Circuit | | Secondary Road |
| | Existing 115kV Double Circuit | | Railroad |
| | Existing 230kV Double Circuit | | Cache la Poudre River |
| | Existing 115kV Single Circuit | | Stream |
| | Existing 230kV Single Circuit | | Ditch or Canal |
| | Existing Substation | | Aqueduct |
| | Rawhide Energy Station | | Lake/Reservoir |
| | Rawhide Property Boundary | | Section Line |
| | | | County Line |
| | | | Township/Range |
| | | | Mine Boundary |
| | | | Municipality |
| | | | Rural Electrical Association Transmission Line |
| | | | Western Area Power Administration 345kV Circuit |



PLATTE RIVER POWER AUTHORITY
FORT COLLINS TRANSMISSION LINE UPGRADE PROJECT
Figure C-1
Project Area, Existing and Proposed Facilities



- (7) Platte River will convert one side of its existing double-circuit LaPorte Substation to LaPorte Tap line to 230kV operation. This circuit will be disconnected from the LaPorte Substation and connected with the new line circuit from Rawhide Energy Station described in item (1).
- (8) Platte River proposes to rebuild and upgrade Western's existing 115kV wood pole line as a double-circuit line from the LaPorte Tap to Western's Poudre Substation. It is proposed to construct one side for 115kV operation and to terminate this circuit in the existing bay at the Poudre Substation. The second side will be designed and constructed for 230kV operation and will be connected at the LaPorte Tap to the line described in item (2). This new 230kV line will bypass the Poudre Substation and connect with Platte River's existing double-circuit line to Timberline when upgraded as described in item (4).
- (9) Platte River will string the second circuit on its existing double-circuit line between the Timberline and Poudre Substations and terminate the new 230kV line at Timberline.
- (10) Platte River proposes to rebuild and upgrade Western's existing 115kV wood pole line between Western's Poudre Substation and Platte River's Richards Lake Substation as a double-circuit line designed for 230kV operation but initially operated at 115kV. It is possible that only one circuit would be strung initially. The City of Fort Collins is investigating the need for a new distribution substation in the general vicinity east of Interstate 25 and north of Highway 14, as new loads continue to develop in that area of the city.

CONSULTATION TO DATE

This Biological Assessment is the result of field surveys of the Project Area and information gathered about biological resources in or near the Project Area.

Both the USFWS and the Colorado Division of Wildlife (CDOW) were contacted to solicit information on listed, candidate, and proposed species. A letter was drafted to the USFWS on 9 August 2000 requesting information on federally protected and proposed species in the Project Area. A response letter was received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on 1 November 2000. A letter concerning rare plant surveys in the Project Area was sent to the USFWS on 7 December 2000.

The CDOW was contacted with phone calls (CDOW 2000a) and through the agency's Wildlife Resource Information Source (WRIS) Internet site in order to learn of wildlife concerns in the Project Area. The CDOW was able to provide a list of species of concern and maps showing the locations of wildlife activity areas.

Larimer County provided a list of species of concern in the Project Area via conversations and a resulting email from Platte River (Fooks 2000). The City of Fort Collins was contacted on 16 October 2000 and a response letter from the City of Fort Collins Natural Resources Department (Manci 2000) was received on 15 November 2000.

The Colorado Natural Heritage Program was contacted (CNHP 2000) and the Natural Diversity

Information Source (CNDIS 2000) for Colorado was visited to augment information provided by the CDOW and USFWS.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT

Sensitive Areas

Sensitive areas in this Project Area are defined as wetlands, riparian habitats, and uplands inhabited by prairie dogs. Such areas within the Project Area are presented in **Figure C-2**. Because of their ecological sensitivity, disturbances to these areas will be avoided during project-related construction and maintenance activities. Avoidance of these areas greatly minimizes the chance that the Proposed Project will affect federally protected and sensitive species.

Listed and Candidate Species

Bald Eagle

The bald eagle, a federally listed threatened species, typically nests near the tops of large trees in close association with water features, such as rivers or lakes, that provide hunting opportunities for fish and waterfowl. Bald eagle pairs generally use the same nest site in successive years, occasionally having one or more nests nearby that are used in alternating years.

There are no known bald eagle nest sites in the Project Area. The nearest active nest is southeast of Fort Collins approximately 6.5 miles southeast of the Timberline Substation along the Cache la Poudre River (CDOW 1998). No areas in or near the Project Area are recognized as summer foraging area or winter concentration areas (CDOW 1998).

Preferred bald eagle winter roost sites, used for sleeping and protection from winter storms, are typically large, live trees in sheltered areas. Eagles leave the roost for feeding areas in early morning and return in the evening. During severe weather they may remain at the roost all day.

Bald eagles winter throughout the eastern quarter of Larimer County and specifically use the Cache la Poudre watershed east of the foothills, especially associated reservoirs, as feeding areas during winter (CDOW 1998). Bald eagles can also be seen in upland areas throughout the winter, feeding on carrion or any rodents that might be active. The CDOW has identified a large portion of the Project Area as bald eagle winter range and many of the reservoirs near the Project Area as winter foraging areas (**Figure C-3**). The Rawhide Plant Reservoir, Park Creek, North Poudre Number 15, Douglas, and Horsetooth Reservoirs, Rock Ridge and Terry Lakes are all known winter foraging areas (CDOW 1998).

Mountain Plover

The mountain plover, a species proposed for listing as threatened. A final decision on the proposal to list this species is overdue (USFWS 1999a). The mountain plover breeds in high, dry, short-grass prairies. Within this habitat, areas of blue grama and buffalo grass are most often utilized, as well as areas of mixed grass associations dominated by needle-and-thread and blue grama (Dinsmore 1983).