

## 7 Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitments of Resources

This section describes the irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources associated with constructing the Proposed Project Components. An “irreversible commitment of resources” occurs when, once committed to the Proposed Project Components, the resource would continue to be committed throughout the life of the Proposed Project. An “irretrievable commitment of resources” refers to those resources that, once used, consumed, destroyed or degraded during construction, operation, or decommissioning of the Proposed Project Components, would cause the resource to be unavailable for use by future generations. Examples of irretrievable types of resources include nonrenewable resources, such as minerals and cultural resources, as well as renewable resources that would be unavailable for the use of future generations such as loss of production, harvest, or habitat.

If wind turbines are not upgraded, upon termination of operations, the Applicants have a contractual obligation to the landowners to remove the wind facilities, including foundations to a depth of four feet. The Applicants also have an obligation to restore the area to a condition reasonably similar to the condition of the surrounding soil. The Applicants may explore alternative methods to accomplish decommissioning of the Proposed Project at the time that this activity approaches. Decommissioning activities would be conducted in compliance with applicable rules and regulations.

Constructing and operating the Proposed Project Components would constitute an irreversible commitment of land, soil and vegetation for the life of the Proposed Project. The area of the underground collector and communication systems would be revegetated. While the Winner Alternative would require a slightly larger use of land, soil and vegetation, the commitments of these resources would be similar for either of the proposed alternatives.

Constructing the wind turbines and transmission structures would remove a minimal amount of agricultural lands from production and is an irreversible and irretrievable commitment of farmland. The Proposed Project would result in few changes to existing agricultural practices because farming and grazing would continue in and around the wind turbines and other Proposed Project Components.

Some biological resources would be lost due to the construction and operation of the Proposed Project Components. Construction of the Proposed Project Components would result in the permanent loss of a small amount of native vegetation and wildlife habitat. Operation of the wind farm would likely result in avian and bat mortalities. A BA has been prepared under Section 7 of the ESA for Federally-listed species for the preferred alternative (the Crow Lake Alternative, see **Section 2.8**), including the Wind Partners’ proposed development. Upon completion of formal consultation, the USFWS will issue a BO. The results of the BO will be addressed in Western’s and RUS’s RODs.

Cultural resources are nonrenewable resources. Potential impacts to cultural resources, such as prehistoric properties, historic properties, and cultural landscapes, were identified in the results of the Class III Survey, survey of historic architectural properties within the Proposed Project

Components viewshed, and TCP Survey that were completed for the preferred alternative (Crow Lake Alternative). Agreements are being developed to ensure avoidance and/or mitigation of adverse effects to historic properties. These agreements are being developed among Western, RUS, SHPO, affected Federal agencies, Applicants, and all interested Native American Tribes. The preferred treatment of any potential TCPs and archaeological sites that are eligible for listing or remain unevaluated for the NRHP is to avoid these identified sites. Avoidance and monitoring protocol during construction would be included in an agreement. Viewshed impacts may occur on historic architectural or structural properties and would be mitigated through a MOA in accordance with 36 CFR 800.6.