

# memorandum

DATE: April 24, 2013

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: KEC-4

SUBJECT: Environmental Clearance Memorandum

TO: Dave Tripp  
Project Manager – TEP-CSB-1

**Proposed Action:** Bald Mountain, Miller Peak, Lines Creek, and Taft Passive Repeater  
Communication Upgrades

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.19 Microwave,  
meterological amd radio towers

**Location:** Mineral and Missoula counties, Montana; Shoshone County, Idaho

**Proposed by:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)

**Description of the Proposed Action:**

BPA proposes to replace the analog communication system with a new digital communication system at four existing communication sites in Montana and Idaho to enable the connection of the digital circuits and ensure communication reliability. All of the sites are located on land managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The sites in Montana are located within the Lolo National Forest and the site in Idaho is within the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. Construction would be staged over the summers of 2013 and 2014. Specific information regarding each site is provided in the following paragraphs.

**Bald Mountain Radio Station– MT T19N R32W SEC 24 & 25 - Missoula County** - The proposed work at an existing communication site would involve construction of a new self-supporting 140 foot (ft) lattice-steel tower on a 35 ft x 35 ft concrete pad. Radio equipment from the existing 30 ft tower would be relocated to the new tower. A new 18 ft x 36 ft building would replace the existing fiberglass structure. A 60 ft long buried power line providing electrical power to the new building would be buried at a depth of 40 inches. An existing propane tank would be removed from site and replaced with a new propane tank suitable to meet current safety standards. The old tower and fiberglass building would be removed once the new facilities are operational. Additional project activities could include use of a hydraulic hammer and rock cutting tools due to the rocky ground. The taller height of the new tower would eliminate the need for future clearing of vegetation in the area to provide a clear beam path. The site is accessible via existing, maintained roads.

**Miller Peak Radio Station – MT T12N R18W SEC32- Missoula County** - The proposed work at the existing communication site involves construction of a new self-supporting 105 ft lattice-steel tower on a 35 ft x 35 ft concrete pad. Radio equipment from the old 35 ft tower would be relocated to the new tower. A new building approximately 18 ft x 34 ft would replace the existing fiberglass structure. A 50 ft long buried power line providing electrical power to the new building would be buried at a depth of 40 inches. Additional project activities could include use of a hydraulic hammer and rock cutting tools due to the rocky ground. One tree 19 inches in diameter would be removed to

make room for the radio station. Some grading and rocking of 900 linear feet of an existing access road would be necessary to support construction equipment.

*Taft Passive Repeater – MT T20N R31W SEC30 – Mineral County* – The proposed work at this site would involve the relocation of a passive repeater from its current location to a new location approximately one mile to the west. The forest composition at the proposed relocation site is lodgepole pine that has been decimated by beetle infestation, leaving large stands of dead, non-merchantable timber. A 50 ft x50 ft area would be cleared of dead, standing wood for the passive repeater. The passive repeater is a 480 square foot sized panel mounted on a 50 ft tower. To maintain clear communication between the Taft Substation and Bald Mountain Radio Site, the radio beam path would require removal of obstructing trees in two 50 ft wide areas extending 350 ft and 700 ft from the passive repeater in two directions. The understory of grasses and low growing shrubs would remain. An existing access road approximately 1.5 miles long accessing the new site would require blading and rocking in spots to allow access for construction vehicles. The existing passive repeater and the concrete footings would be removed and the tree canopy within the old beam path allowed to naturally reestablish.

*Lines Creek Radio Station – ID T44N, R2E SEC33 - Shoshone County* - The proposed work at this site involves construction of a new self supporting 140 ft lattice-steel tower on a 30 ft x 30 ft concrete pad to replace an existing 65 ft tower. A new 18 ft x 36 ft wood frame building would replace the existing fiberglass structure. The new building would house batteries, communication racks, a generator, and an HVAC system. A power line 40 feet long providing electrical power supply would be buried underground between an electrical cabinet and the new building. The existing radio station would be decommissioned and removed from the site. The existing propane tank would also be removed from the site and replaced with two new propane tanks suitable to meet current safety standards. All construction activity would occur within a previously disturbed area. The site is accessible by existing, maintained access roads.

### **Findings:**

The U.S. Forest Service – Lolo National Forest- Superior Ranger District has been consulted with regarding three of the communication sites. On January 29, 2013, the Forest Service issued a decision memo categorically excluding the proposed action at Bald Mountain and Taft Passive Repeater, approving the issuance of a communication lease to BPA. The District Ranger determined that changes proposed for Miller Peak were consistent with the provisions of BPA’s current special use permit and needed no further analysis by the Forest Service. The Montana State Historic Preservation Office concurred with BPA’s determination that no historic properties would be affected on October 15, 2012. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes of the Flathead Nation provided their concurrence on November 15, 2012. No response was received from the Kalispel Tribe of Indians, Confederated Salish and Kooteni Tribes, or Spokane Tribe of Indians.

On September 11, 2012, the Idaho Panhandle Forest – St. Joe Ranger District issued a decision memo regarding the Lines Creek Radio Site. Under the terms of a Programmatic Agreement between the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation and the National Forests of Region 1 in Idaho, the Forest Archaeologist issued a “no inventory” determination on May 17, 2012.

BPA has determined that the proposed action complies with Section 1021.410 and Appendix B of Subpart D of the Department of Energy’s (DOE) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

Regulations (57 FR 15144, Apr. 24, 1992, as amended at 61 FR 36221-36243, July 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011). The proposed action does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. The proposal is not connected [40 C.F.R. 1508.25(a)(1)] to other actions with potentially significant impacts, has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion, is not related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts [40 C.F.R. 1508.25(a)(2)], and is not precluded by 40 C.F.R. 1506.1 or 10 C.F.R. 1021.211. Moreover, the proposed action would not (i) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, (ii) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities, (iii) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that pre-exist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases, (iv) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, or (v) involve genetically engineered organisms, synthetic biology, governmentally designated noxious weeds, or invasive species, unless the proposed activity would be contained or confined in a manner designed and operated to prevent unauthorized release into the environment and conducted in accordance with applicable requirements.

This proposed action meets the requirements for the Categorical Exclusion referenced above. We therefore determine that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further NEPA review and documentation.

*/s/ Carolyn A. Sharp*  
Carolyn A. Sharp  
Environmental Project Manager

Concur:

*/s/ Katherine S. Pierce*  
Katherine S. Pierce  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: *April 24, 2013*

Attachment: *Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions*

# Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions

Name of Proposed Project: Bald Mountain, Miller Peak, Lines Creek and Taft Passive Repeater Communication Upgrades

Work Order #: 316506, 254986, 254981, 316663

**This project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts on the following environmentally sensitive resources. See 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B for complete descriptions of the resources. This checklist is to be used as a summary – further discussion may be included in the Categorical Exclusion Memorandum.**

Environmental Resources	No Potential for Significance	No Potential, with Conditions (describe)
1. Historic Properties and Cultural Resources Montana sites - MT SHPO concurrence on no effect determination October 15, 2012. Confederated Salish and Kootenai concurrence received November 15, 2012. Other tribes consulted did not respond. Idaho site: Lines Creek addressed under Forest Service programmatic agreement	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. T & E Species, or their habitat(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Floodplains or wetlands	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Areas of special designation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Health & safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Prime or unique farmlands	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Special sources of water	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Other (describe) Forest Service Decision Memo signed January 29, 2013 for sites in Montana and September 11, 2012 for the Idaho site.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signed: Carolyn Sharp

Date: April 24, 2013