

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

**Gering-Bridgeport-Sidney Fiber Optic Addition
Scottsbluff, Morrill, and Cheyenne Counties, Nebraska**

A. Brief Description of Proposal: Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to install a 48-count fiber optic ground wire (OPGW) on Western's existing Gering to Bridgeport (GS-BPT) and Bridgeport to Sidney (BPT-SD) 115-kV Transmission Line between the Gering, Bridgeport, and Sidney Substations. The OPGW will replace one existing overhead ground wire (OGW). Western proposes to excavate a 150-foot long trench from Structure No. 2 of the BPT-SD Transmission Line, northwest to the cable vault, just outside the Sidney Substation. Termination of the OPGW will be required at each intermediate substation. Other necessary splice locations will be determined by the construction contractor after the contract is awarded. This will be a joint project between Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. and Western. Each party will be entitled to 24 fibers on the OPGW line. The existing transmission line consists of wood H-Frame structures with 397 MCM ACSR conductors with 2 existing OGWs. Most of the line crosses private agricultural land. All work would be confined to Western's right-of-way (ROW) easement. Existing access would be used and no new roads are proposed. Work is scheduled to start in 2015.

Additional construction details proposed for the Gering-Bridgeport-Sidney 115-kV Transmission Line includes the following:

- 1) Western proposes to replace the existing OGW with 48-count OPGW on 70 miles of existing 115-kV Gering-Bridgeport-Sidney Transmission Line.
 - a. Install/replace proper hardware assemblies on existing structures.
 - b. Install splice boxes or "pulling sites" at Dalton, Greenwood, and McGrew Taps.
- 2) Western proposes to terminate OPGW in the Gering, Bridgeport, and Sidney Substations.
- 3) Western proposes to install fiber patch panels at Gering, Bridgeport, and Sidney Control Buildings.

The type of construction equipment to be utilized is a spool trailer, pickup, trencher and bucket truck. All equipment utilized would be rubber tired vehicles. To access the work areas, maintenance crews would use existing access roads.

B. Number and Title of the Categorical Exclusion Being Applied: (See text in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.)

B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable.

Adding fiber optic cables to transmission facilities or burying fiber optic cable in existing powerline or pipeline rights-of-way. Covered actions may include associated vaults and pulling and tensioning sites outside of rights-of-way in nearby previously disturbed or developed areas.

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C. Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410 (b): (See full text in regulation and attached checklist.)

1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix A or B to Subpart D.

For classes of actions listed in Appendix B, the following conditions are integral elements. To fit within a class, the proposal must not:

- Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders;
- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities;
- Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases;
- Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order, statute, or regulation by Federal, State, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to; those listed in paragraph B. (4) (see Attachment A).

2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

3) The proposal is not “connected” to other actions with potentially significant impacts, is not related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts, and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211.

D. Special Stipulations Pertaining to the Proposal:

If the scope of work of this project changes, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for additional environmental review.

This Categorical Exclusion is valid only from signature date through the end of calendar year 2015. If routine maintenance has not commenced within that time, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review prior to routine maintenance.

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If any cultural materials are discovered during construction, work in the area shall halt immediately, Western's Regional Preservation Officer shall be contacted, and the material be evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983).

Construction crews and equipment shall have limited movement within the maintenance corridor, including access routes, to minimize damage beyond the ROW corridor. Terrain and vegetation shall be preserved and protected from damage by maintenance crew operations and equipment. If operations or equipment causes terrain damage, the maintenance crew repairs the damage. There will be no ground disturbing activities such as road maintenance or pad clearing. All equipment will be rubber-tired vehicles.

Avian flight diverters will be placed on the overhead static (or shield) wires west and south of the Bridgeport Substation from the substation to Structures Nos. 284A, 284B, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, and 290 and Structures Nos. 282, 281, 280, 279, 278, and 277 of the ROW to reduce the risk for bird collisions with these lines.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, if the work is to be done during the general nesting season which is typically between March 1 and July 31, Western's construction Project Manager will consult with Western's biologist to ensure that there are no nests in the project vicinity. Work conducted during the general nesting season will require a field biologist to survey areas in advance of the work crews. Western will provide the field biologist services.

Western shall exercise care to preserve the natural landscape and shall conduct this construction operation to prevent any unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the project vicinity. Except where clearing is required for permanent works, approved construction roads, or excavation operations, vegetation shall be preserved and shall be protected from damage by Western's construction operations and equipment.

To minimize impacts to potentially buried cultural resources or the environment, and prevent damage to access roads and ROWs, operation of off-road equipment will not be permitted during periods of heavy rains, when soils are wet, or when excessive soil damage may occur due to unsuitable operating conditions. No construction or routine maintenance activities shall be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support construction equipment. If equipment creates ruts in excess of 6 inches deep, the soil shall be deemed too wet to adequately support construction equipment.

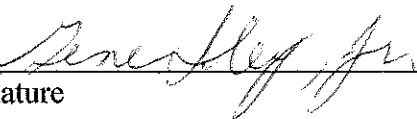
All equipment used should be cleaned prior to use in the area to prevent transporting of invasive plant or noxious weed seeds.

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E. Determination: Based on my review of information provided to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, I determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class of actions, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is categorically excluded from requirements for an EA or an EIS.


Signature

Date: 8/6/14

Gene Iley, Jr.
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
Western Area Power Administration

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ATTACHMENT A

**Conditions That Are Integral Elements of the Classes
of Actions in Appendix B That Apply to This Proposal**

Checklist for Categorical Exclusion Determination, revised Nov. 2011

Application of Categorical Exclusions (1021.410)	Disagree	Agree	Unknown
(b)(1) The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in appendix B to subpart D.		X	
(b)(2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal, including, but not limited to, scientific controversy about the environmental effects of the proposal; uncertain effects or effects involving unique or unknown risks; and unresolved conflicts concerning alternate uses of available resources.		X	
(b)(3) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. Segmentation can occur when a proposal is broken down into small parts in order to avoid the appearance of significance of the total action. The scope of a proposal must include the consideration of connected and cumulative actions, that is, the proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or § 1021.211 of this part concerning limitations on actions during EIS preparation.		X	
B. Conditions that are Integral Elements of the Classes of Actions in Appendix B.	NO	YES	Unknown
(1) Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.	X		
(2) Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities.	X		
(3) Disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or CERCLA-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases.	X		
(4) Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order,	X		

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statue, or regulation by Federal, state, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to:			
(i) Property (such as sites, buildings, structures, and objects) of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance designated by a Federal, state, or local government, or property determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places;	X		
(ii) Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat (including critical habitat) or Federally-proposed or candidate species or their habitat (Endangered Species Act); state-listed or state-proposed endangered or threatened species or their habitat; Federally-protected marine mammals and Essential Fish Habitat (Marine Mammal Protection Act; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act); and otherwise Federally-protected species (such as under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act or the Migratory Bird Treaty Act);	X		
(iii) Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, —Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);	X		
(iv) Areas having a special designation such as Federally- and state-designated wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national natural landmarks, wild and scenic rivers, state and Federal wildlife refuges, scenic areas (such as National Scenic and Historic Trails or National Scenic Areas), and marine sanctuaries;	X		
(v) Prime or unique farmland, or other farmland of statewide or local importance, as defined at 7 CFR 658.2(a), —Farmland Protection Policy Act: Definitions, or its successor;	X		
(vi) Special sources of water (such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources that are vital in a region); and	X		
(vii) Tundra, coral reefs, or rain forests; or	X		

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<p>(5) 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, such as those of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.</p>	<p>X</p>		
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