

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Alberton Radio Site Construction

Project Manager: Dave Tripp, TEP-CSB-1

Location: Missoula County, Montana

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

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to construct a new radio site to increase the bandwidth on BPA's communication system in Montana that is congested and frequently affected by extreme weather conditions. The new radio site would be located on undeveloped private land adjacent to the Lolo National Forest in Missoula County, Montana, approximately halfway between two existing radio sites that are 60 miles apart. This analysis supersedes the environmental analysis described in a CX dated August 26, 2013 due to a change in the design.

The project includes preparing an undeveloped site, constructing a new 18-foot by 36-foot building to house communication equipment, constructing a 140-foot tall steel lattice tower on a 30-foot by 30-foot concrete pad foundation, and installing two 1,000 gallon propane tanks for backup power. An area roughly 100 feet by 130 feet would be cleared, graded, and filled to create sufficient level ground to accommodate the radio facility.

Erosion control measures would be installed prior to ground disturbance and cutting of the subgrade to create a benched slope for the site access road. Approximately 500 feet of gravel road would be constructed, approximately 80 feet of which would be on Lolo National Forest (LNF) lands. The remaining portion of the road would be located on private land. Roughly 2,100 cubic yards of granular structural fill would be laid to grade the access road base. Excess materials estimated at 2,500 cubic yards (soils and woody vegetation that have been cleared) would be disposed of off-site. All areas beyond the limits of grading would be restored and replanted with a seed mix specified by the landowner/land manager, as appropriate. Site preparation would require removal of 140 trees, most of which are 6 to 9 inches in diameter. Limited vegetation clearing of trees taller than 50 feet within two 30 foot-wide communication beam paths to a distance of 70 feet from the communication tower may also be necessary. These beam paths would cross private land.

Power to the communication building would be supplied via a transformer located along the access road. An existing transformer would be relocated to a spot approximately 100 feet to the west of the proposed communication building. A trench approximately 300 feet long would be dug to accommodate the primary power feeder. This trench would be about 40 inches deep and located within the boundaries of the proposed access road. Another trench from the transformer to the building within the new access road prism would be approximately 100 feet in length to accommodate a single 4-inch PVC conduit 40 inches below grade. Trenching between the tower and building would

provide for two ground grid connections 12 to 18 inches below finished grade. Trenches would be typically 18 inches wide. Construction would be staged over the summers of 2015 and 2016.

Findings: In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) 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), BPA has determined that the proposed action:

- (1) fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D (see attached Environmental Checklist);
- (2) does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- (3) has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on these determinations, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ Justin T. Moffett

Justin Moffett

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katherine S. Pierce

Katherine S. Pierce

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: April 6, 2015

Attachment(s): Environmental Checklist

Categorical Exclusion Environmental Checklist

This checklist documents environmental considerations for the proposed project and explains why the project would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources and would meet other integral elements of the applied categorical exclusion.

Proposed Action: **Alberton Radio Site Construction**

Project Site Description

Land use and ownership includes low density private residential development and forestland owned and managed by the Ninemile District of the Lolo National Forest. The communication site itself would be on undeveloped, private land that BPA would acquire. The site is accessible by existing roads with unrestricted public access, with the exception of a gate just before the turnoff to the communication site.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> MT SHPO issued concurrence on no effect determination 2/13/13. Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Nez Perce, and Coeur d’Alene Tribes consulted – no response. APE remained the same with the project redesign, consultation not reinitiated.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Erosion control measures will be installed prior to ground disturbance. Excess soils remaining after site preparation will be removed from the site.</p>		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> No special status species present. 0.3 acre of second growth timber, and native understory plants removed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disturbed areas will be revegetated with a seed mix specified by LNF or landowner. 		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Insufficient snowpack during winter months to provide Canada lynx habitat. Project area is within grizzly bear connectivity area identified in the 2013 Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem Conservation Strategy. USFWS concurred with a May Affect/Not Likely to Adversely Affect determination 12/19/14.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest Service Food/Wildlife Attractant Storage Special Order (#F11-005) will be enforced during construction to minimize potential conflicts. 		

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**
(including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)



Explanation: No water bodies present. Project is on a ridgeline.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: None present.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No new wells or use of ground water proposed. Spill prevention measures will be present on site.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation: New radio facility would be consistent with surrounding low-density residential development.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: Forested areas will obscure the view of the radio site from surrounding low-density residential development.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Temporary dust and vehicle emissions during construction.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Temporary construction noise during daylight hours. Operational noise will result in slight increase to ambient noise levels. Standing next to the building, the noise would register at 65 decibels - as loud as a normal conversation.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: No known soil contamination or hazardous conditions.

Evaluation of Other Integral Elements

The proposed project would also meet conditions that are integral elements of the categorical exclusion. The project would not:

- Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.

Explanation, if necessary:

- Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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.

Explanation, if necessary:

- 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.

Explanation, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: Coordination has occurred with the Lolo National Forest – Ninemile District for the construction of the 80 feet of access road on Forest Service managed land; specific mitigation requested will be implemented.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts on any environmentally sensitive resources.

Signed: /s/ Justin T. Moffett
Justin Moffett, KEC-4

Date: April 6, 2015