

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

**Basin – Worland Section of the Lovell – Thermopolis 115-kV Transmission Line Reconductor
Big Horn and Washakie Counties, Wyoming
Project Number: 2014-065**

- A. **Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to rebuild the Basin – Worland (BA-WRD) section of the Lovell – Thermopolis (LV-TH) 115-kV Transmission Line, located in Big Horn and Washakie Counties, Wyoming. The project is needed because an outage of the Yellowtail – Yellowtail PACE 230-kV tie line resulted in an overload on the BA – WRD Transmission Line. The Western Electricity Coordinating Council and North American Electric Reliability Corporation Transmission System Planning Performance Requirements for single contingencies require the system to be able to withstand an outage without thermal or voltage violations. The reconductor project will mitigate the overload violation and will allow Western to fully schedule Yellowtail generation to the south under single contingencies. The project will also support Western’s commitment to serve cost-based power to its customers.

The principal components of the transmission line work include reconductoring approximately 15 miles of single circuit transmission line. The conductor and associated hardware will be replaced from Structures 30/6B to the take-off structure at the Basin Substation. The rebuilt transmission line will be upgraded with a larger conductor and would continue to operate at 115-kV. There are 120 structures in this section; 87 light duty steel H-frames and 33 wood structures. Due to sag requirements of the new conductor, approximately thirteen wood structures will need to be replaced along the transmission line. No steel structures will be replaced. The majority of the new 115-kV structures would be approximately 5 to 10 feet taller than the existing 115-kV structures in order to accommodate the larger conductor and sag requirements. Western is proposing to use wood pole H-frame structures for the rebuild project. Fiber optic ground wire will also be added to the structures in order to continue a fiber path from Basin to Thermopolis.

Additionally, the project consists of road maintenance and repairs of existing access roads. The road maintenance will remain within the existing right-of-ways (ROWs) for access roads and transmission lines.

Road maintenance activities will include:

- Access road grading and improvements. A rubber-tired motor grader or track dozer would grade and improve sections of the access road to create a smooth surface, safe for maintenance crew travel.
- Drainage systems. Inspect, repair, and remove sediment from water bars, roadway and borrow ditches. Debris will be spread on existing access roads.
- Culverts. Install, replace, or repair culverts and remove sediment from culverts.
- Brush clearing. Minor clearing of brush and trees close to the structures and blocking access roads.

The project would not change the size of the ROW or the way it is maintained. Spool trucks will be used to pull, wind, and remove the old conductor and then feed, tighten, and secure the new suspended conductor. In addition, a splicing truck, boom (cherry picker) bucket truck, and a cable spool container truck will be used. Ground disturbance would be limited to that associated with utility trucks operating at the “pull sites.”

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

B4.13 Upgrading and Rebuilding Existing Powerlines

Upgrading or rebuilding approximately 20 miles-in-length or less of existing electric powerlines, which may involve minor relocations of small segments of the powerlines.

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; and
- 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.

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This Categorical Exclusion expires two years from the signature date. If all project work has not been completed by the expiration date, or if need for an environmental compliance extension is anticipated, Western's Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, maintenance work should be scheduled outside the March 1 through July 31 general nesting periods. If the maintenance work is to be done during this period, contact Western's Environmental Division so that they may arrange for a pedestrian survey to be conducted in advance of the maintenance crews to identify active nests that are to be avoided.

The contractor shall limit the movement of its crews and equipment to the ROW, including access routes. The contractor shall limit movement on the ROW to minimize damage to grazing land, crops, or property, and shall avoid unnecessary land disturbance.

No disturbance of vegetation will occur within 100 meters of a stream. No fueling, pulling sites, staging or storage areas would be placed within 100 meters of wetlands, streams or riparian areas. Where possible, vehicles should avoid crossing extremely wet (hydric) soils.

No construction or 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 six inches deep, the soil shall be deemed too wet to adequately support construction equipment.

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.

The contractor is responsible for determining all pulling and splicing locations. If the contractor wishes to use pulling locations or staging areas that are outside of Western's ROW, then the contractor shall allow Western a minimum of 60 days, after receipt of the proposed site, to review and environmentally clear the area.

Western shall request the assistance of a contractor to provide paleontological assessment and monitoring services prior to and during construction activities associated with the project. It has been estimated that 75 – 80% of the project lies within the Willwood Formation. Western shall provide a qualified paleontologist to monitor the construction activities on lands under BLM jurisdiction to ensure no fossil remains are disturbed or destroyed during construction. The contractor must have a valid permit allowing them to work on BLM-administered lands.

Western has coordinated this undertaking with the Bureau of Land Management and relevant federally-recognized American Indian tribes and the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer to fulfill its responsibilities under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, and implementing regulation 36 CFR 800, Protection of Historic Properties. Cultural

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monitors are required during construction. The Contractor will be required to avoid certain areas marked with flagging or wooden lathe. There is a treatment plan in place for the historic properties located within the project area. There is a discovery protocol in place for inadvertent discoveries of buried cultural resources or potential human remains. The cultural monitors will be qualified professional archaeologists and possibly tribal representatives. Western is the lead Federal agency for this undertaking.

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

- E. Determination:** Based on my review of information provided to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, I have 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: 27 APRIL 2016

Brian Little
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
Western Area Power Administration

Prepared by: Brian Little

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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, statute, or	X		

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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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(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.	X		
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