

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Bald Mountain – Taft Substation Fiber Optic Cable Installation

**Project No.:** P00116

**Project Manager:** Cynthia Rounds, TEP-TPP-1

**Location:** Mineral County, Montana

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.7 Fiber optic cable

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to install approximately 8.5 miles of fiber optic cable between its Taft Substation and its Bald Mountain radio communication site. The fiber optic plan-of-service is required to improve BPA's telecommunications capacity needed to support safe and reliable operation of the transmission system. About half of the fiber optic cable would be installed aerially on existing lattice steel towers along BPA's Dworshak-Taft 500-kilovolt transmission line, while the other half would be installed underground, primarily along Rainy Creek Road (Forest Service Road 391), using horizontal directional drilling.

With the exception of some access road improvements (described below), installation of the fiber optic cable on existing transmission towers would require minimal ground disturbance. Construction vehicles would access the transmission towers using existing roads, thus limiting disturbance to crushing/matting of small woody shrubs and herbaceous vegetation along the roads and below the transmission towers. Similarly, the underground portion of the fiber optic cable route would require minimal ground disturbance.

Installation of the aerial portion of fiber optic cable requires pulling and tensioning. Sites selected for tensioning can accommodate pulling and tensioning equipment but may need to be cleared of interfering vegetation (using a chainsaw, mowers, brushing machines, heavy equipment, or hand tools) to position pulling/tensioning equipment. Up to four pulling and tensioning sites within the right-of-way would be needed for the Proposed Action; each site would utilize an area about 150 feet by 100 feet (about 0.3 acre), although ground disturbance would be minimal at these sites.

Placement of the fiber along Rainy Creek Road using horizontal directional drilling would include installation of up to six below ground fiber optic cable vaults. The vaults, which measure 4 foot-square x 4 feet deep, would be placed in holes excavated outside the road prism on the upslope side of Rainy Creek Road. Additionally, up to four assist points (estimated to be 4 foot-square x 4 feet deep) would be excavated along the fiber route. The assist points may be needed to help pull the fiber optic cable through the underground conduit. The exact locations of the vaults and assist points would be determined in the field based upon soil conditions and curvature of the road; however, it may be possible to utilize some of the assist points for vault locations, thus limiting the amount of soil disturbance. The total combined disturbance from the fiber optic cable installation would be less than 0.1 acre.

Approximately 0.8 mile of existing access roads would also be rebuilt or improved (e.g., graded and rocked, improved drainage features, stabilize cut slopes) to provide construction access to install the

aerial portion of the fiber optic cable; however, no new access roads would be constructed. The majority of access road work would require ground disturbances up to 16 feet in width, and minor widening of existing access roads may be necessary. Additionally BPA would install a single span temporary bridge across Randolph Creek to access structures 89/4 to 89/6; the bridge would be in place for about three weeks and would be removed once it is no longer needed. The total disturbance from access road work would be about 1.5 acres.

BPA also proposes to use an approximately 3 acre undeveloped area about 400 feet east of structure 86/2 for temporary storage of construction vehicles, equipment, and materials. BPA would install a temporary chain-link fence around the site to secure the construction vehicles, equipment, and materials. The fence and all construction materials would be removed following completion of the project.

Although no tree removal appears to be required, there is the potential that up to 20 merchantable trees (>6-inches diameter at breast height) may be removed depending upon the final locations of the below ground vaults or the aerial fiber optic cable pulling and tensioning sites. If tree removal is necessary, trees would be cut by hand with a chainsaw and the debris would be lopped and scattered, and left in place.

All disturbed areas would be restored to preconstruction conditions and revegetated with a Forest Service approved erosion control seed mix.

**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 Moffett

Justin Moffett

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Stacy L. Mason

Stacy L. Mason

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: June 21, 2016

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:** Bald Mountain – Taft Substation Fiber Optic Cable Installation

## Project Site Description

The site consists of a maintained transmission line right-of-way that crosses Lolo National Forest, Interstate 90, and highly used open gravel roads.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
<b>1. Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with BPA’s determination of No Historic Properties Affected on November 20, 2015. BPA also consulted with the Coeur d’ Alene Tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the United States Forest Service, Lolo National Forest (Forest Service). While the tribes did not comment on the project, the Forest Service requested BPA implement the mitigation measures listed below.</p> <p><u>Mitigation:</u> Implement an Inadvertent Discovery Protocol (IDP) in the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities. Actions to be taken under the IDP include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Stopping work in the vicinity and immediately notifying the BPA environmental lead, BPA and Forest Service archaeologists, BPA project manager, interested tribes, Montana SHPO, and the appropriate local, state and federal agencies.</li><li>✓ Implementing reasonable measures to protect the discovery site, including any appropriate stabilization or covering.</li><li>✓ Taking reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the discovery site, including restricting access.</li></ul>		
<b>2. Geology and Soils</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Less than 0.1 acre of temporary disturbance for installation fiber optic cable and vaults.</p> <p><u>Mitigation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Implement erosion and sediment control best management practices (BMPs) prior to any vegetation clearing and ground disturbing activities.</li><li>✓ Below ground vaults installed adjacent to Rainy Creek Road will be located outside (upslope) of the road prism and any roadside drainage ditches.</li><li>✓ Where excavation into the Rainy Creek Road cut bank or adjacent hillside is required to install below ground vaults, install eco-block retaining wall (or similar structure with Forest Service approval) to stabilize cut bank.</li></ul>		

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)

Explanation: There are no special-status species and no designated habitat present in the project area. Tree and shrub species that could be removed include Douglas fir, western larch, ponderosa pine, rocky mountain maple, thimble berry, and snowberry.

Mitigation:

- ✓ Reseed disturbed areas with Forest Service approved seed mix.
- ✓ BPA will direct its Contractor to locate below ground vaults in areas that do not require tree removal. However, if tree removal is deemed necessary, BPA will notify the Forest Service at least 2 weeks prior to removing any trees.
- ✓ Clean and inspect all construction vehicles and equipment prior to entering project site to prevent introduction of invasive weeds onsite.
- ✓ Clean and inspect all construction vehicles and equipment prior to exiting project site to prevent spread of invasive weeds (e.g., knapweed, tansy ragwort) offsite.

4. **Wildlife** (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Explanation: There are no special-status species and no designated habitat present in the project area; however, the Canada lynx, a federally-listed threatened species, is known to occur in the broad vicinity. Because of the limited nature of the disturbance planned within BPA right-of way and on/along Rainy Creek Road (an open, highly utilized road), there is no potential to affect Canada lynx or its habitat.

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

Explanation: Several small tributaries intermittent and ephemeral stream channels cross the underground fiber route along Rainy Creek Road.

Mitigation:

- ✓ Install the underground fiber at a minimum depth of 4 feet below the stream bed to avoid impacts to culvert crossings, as well as channel substrate and instream flows.
- ✓ Identify tributaries in the BPA Implementation Table (MIT) and construction photomaps as “Sensitive Areas” that must be avoided.

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation: There are no wetlands within the project area; however, there are wetlands along Rainy Creek immediately outside the project area.

Mitigation:

- ✓ Identify wetlands in the BPA Mitigation MIT and construction photomaps as “Sensitive Areas” that must be avoided.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed. Proposed fiber drilling and vault excavation would not be deep enough to intercept groundwater.

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

Explanation: The proposed action would not alter or affect existing land use in the long-term. However, Rainy Creek Road, which is the primary construction route for the proposed action, is a heavily used route that provides public access to the east portal entrance to the Route of the Hiawatha bike trail. Use of the trail peaks annually between Memorial Day and Labor Day, which overlaps with BPA’s proposed summer construction schedule (approximately

August 15-October 31, 2016).

Mitigation:

To prevent conflicts between the trail users and BPA construction crews, BPA will implement the following measures:

- ✓ Coordinate with the Forest Service public information office to provide advance public notice of the construction schedule via Forest Service website, email notifications, local newspapers or other media.
- ✓ Provide traffic controls, as needed, to ensure the public has safe access to Rainy Creek Road and the east portal entrance to the Route of the Hiawatha at all times during construction.
- ✓ To the extent practicable, limit construction activities that encroach into the Rainy Creek travel lane to the hours of 5:30am-9am.
- ✓ Maintain a minimum 15-foot clearance on Rainy Creek Road at all times during construction.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The aerial segment of the fiber optic cable would be attached to existing facilities on BPA right-of-way and would not alter or affect visual quality. With the exception of the below ground vaults and associated retaining walls, the underground portion of the fiber optic cable would be hidden from view.

Mitigation:

- ✓ BPA will coordinate with the Forest Service to ensure the vaults and retaining wall designs comply with applicable standards and guidelines for visual quality.
- ✓ Where possible BPA will cover fiber optic vaults with soil.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Fugitive dust and vehicle emissions produced during construction activities would be temporary and minimal.

Mitigation:

- ✓ BPA will contribute \$10,000 to the Forest Service's 2016 budget to apply dust palliatives to Rainy Creek Road.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Construction noise would be intermittent, temporary, and localized; there are no residences or other sensitive noise receptors in the immediate vicinity. Construction would be limited to daytime hours (5:30 am-7pm).

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Project activities would not affect human health or safety.

**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:

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### **Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: BPA has worked closely with the Forest Service to ensure project complies with their management standards and guidelines.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Moffett  
Justin Moffett ECT-4

Date: June 21, 2016