

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Idaho Maintenance Headquarters to Thunder Ridge Microwave Radio Installation

**Project Manager:** Vincent “Charley” Majors—TEP-CSB-2

**Location:** Bonneville County, Idaho

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

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install a microwave radio link from the existing Idaho Falls Maintenance Headquarters location to the Thunder Ridge radio site. The Thunder Ridge tower is scheduled for construction on Iona Butte in the spring of 2017. The Thunder Ridge tower has previously undergone an environmental review including a Section 106 review, and it was determined to have no effects to environmental, cultural, or historical resources. As part of the current project, one additional microwave antenna would be installed on the Thunder Ridge tower.

At the Idaho Falls Maintenance Headquarters, BPA would install a 100-foot, three-legged, free-standing lattice communication tower on a 25-foot by 25-foot concrete foundation. The associated equipment would be located within the facility’s main building and would consist of a microwave radio, alarm system, circuit routing equipment, battery, and charger system. The work would require two trenches to be dug. One 135-foot-long trench would be dug between the proposed tower and the equipment room to accommodate a conduit for radio cables. The other trench would be dug approximately 300-feet long for a conduit containing power cables between the tower and an existing transformer located near Lindsay Boulevard. Each trench would be dug to a depth of four feet.

As part of this project, the entire building would be re-painted, to match the existing color of the building, which is tan.

**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/ Beth Belanger

Beth Belanger

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Motus Recruiting & Staffing

Reviewed by:

/s/ Gene Lynard

Gene Lynard

Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Date: August 31, 2016

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment: 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.

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## Project Site Description

The project is occurring in two locations—the BPA Thunder Ridge Communications site and BPA Idaho Falls Maintenance Headquarters. Both sites are located in Bonneville County, in eastern Idaho.

The Thunder Ridge communications tower is located at Township 3 North, Range 39 East, Section 32. The site is on Iona Butte, approximately ten miles northeast of Idaho Falls. Iona Butte is developed with multiple communications towers along the ridge. The surrounding area consists of mostly undeveloped land and agricultural fields.

The Idaho Falls Maintenance Headquarters is located at Township 2 North, Range 37 East, Section 13. The site is located in Idaho Falls, near the Highway 20 and Interstate 15 interchange. The topography is relatively level. The Snake River is located approximately 600 feet to the east of the project location. The surrounding area is developed with an RV park to the east, a hotel to the south, and grain silos and other various industrial buildings to the north and west.

A review of the National Wetland Inventory, soil information, topography, and aerial photos did not reveal any wetlands or water bodies at either site.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> On April 8, 2016, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, and Shoshone Bannock Tribes of the Fort Hall Reservation.</p> <p>On July 22, 2016, a Section 106 report was sent to all consulting parties.</p> <p>On August 9, 2016, Idaho SHPO concurred with BPA’s findings that the proposed project would unlikely have any adverse effects to cultural or historic resources. To date, neither of the tribes has responded with interest in commenting on the project.</p> <p>In the event of an inadvertent archaeological discovery, all construction work would cease until the BPA archaeologist and other appropriate parties are notified, and suitable action is taken.</p>		

<b>2. Geology and Soils</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Ground disturbance for the proposed project would consist of excavating to a maximum depth of 4 feet for the tower foundation and trench route for utility placement. The ground disturbance is occurring in the maintenance headquarters’ equipment yard, which is graveled and devoid of vegetation and has been subject to previous ground disturbance.</p>		

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



Explanation: The project area is graveled and devoid of vegetation. No special-status species are present.

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



Explanation: The project area is within a fenced facility that has a graveled yard, which is devoid of vegetation. The site does not have suitable habitat to support special-status species; therefore, there would be no effect to any listed or special-status species.

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



Explanation: The project area does not contain any water bodies, floodplains, or listed fish species. The nearest waterbody is the Snake River, which is located approximately 600 feet from the project location. Best management practices (BMPs) would be used to prevent erosion, sedimentation, and hazardous spills.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: The project area does not contain any wetlands.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: The project would not impact groundwater or aquifers. A geotechnical investigation determined that a hard basalt layer of rock was reached at approximately eight to nine feet below the surface. Ground water was not located above that level. The tower footings would be to a depth of approximately 3-feet deep.

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



Explanation: There would be no permanent changes to the land use at this location. Trenched areas would be returned to the present use.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The installation of a 100-foot communications tower would be visually consistent with the surrounding industrial land use. The tower would be somewhat screened from the RV Park by the existing trees.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: There may be a small amount of dust and vehicle emissions during construction; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after construction.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Temporary construction noise during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: No impact.

### **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: The project would be occurring on BPA fee-owned property.

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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/ Beth Belanger

Date: August 31, 2016

Beth Belanger

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist

Motus Recruiting & Staffing