

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

**Ault - Weld West 230-kV, Cheyenne - Snowy Range 230-kV, and Erie - Terry Street 115-kV
Transmission Line Fiber Optic Ground Wire Installation
Broomfield and Weld Counties, Colorado and Laramie County, Wyoming
*Project Numbers 2015-095, 2015-096, and 2015-097***

- A. **Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) proposes to install new fiber optic ground wire (OPGW) on WAPA's existing Ault - Weld West 230-kV (AU-WLD W), Cheyenne - Snowy Range 230-kV (CH-SNG), and Erie - Terry Street 115-kV (EE-TRR) Transmission Lines. The project would also include the installation of new OPGW equipment at the Ault (AU), Cheyenne (CH), Erie (EE), and Weld (WLD) Substations, to fully integrate the new OPGW into WAPA's communication system. This project is part of WAPA's ongoing program to update and improve its communication system.

The new OPGW on AU-WLD W would replace 12.7-miles of the existing overhead ground wire (OGW) between AU-V9 (take-off-structure [TOS] at AU) and the TOS at WLD. Trenching would be required within the substation yards at AU and WLD. This work would occur in Weld County, Colorado.

The new OPGW on CH-SNG would replace 2.2-miles of the existing OGW between Structures 0/1C (at CH) and 2/2. Trenching would be required within the CH substation yard. This work would occur in Laramie County, Wyoming.

The new OPGW on EE-TRR would replace 1.1-miles of the existing OGW between Structures 30/6 and 31/8A, jumping to Structure 0/1A on the Erie - Spires 230-kV (EE-SRS) Transmission Line, then continuing to Structure SRS (TOS at EE). Trenching would be required within the EE substation yard, and between the fiber vault on the east side of I-25 and Structure 30/6. This work would occur in Broomfield and Weld Counties in Colorado.

The OPGW will be elevated to the top of the existing transmission line structures and then pulled into place. These "pulling sites" will vary depending on spool length. Spool trucks are used to pull, wind, and remove the old cable, then feed, tighten, and secure the new suspended cable. In addition, the individual lengths of OPGW would be spliced together at regular intervals along the spans. Additional equipment that may be used includes helicopters, splicing trucks, splicing trailers, bucket trucks, and spool trailers. Work would be restricted to the existing right-of-way (ROW) and no roadwork would occur unless the OPGW contractor requests otherwise, in which case additional environmental review would occur.

- 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 ROW. Covered actions may include associated vaults and pulling and tensioning sites outside of ROW in nearby previously disturbed or developed areas.

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

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- 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, WAPA’s Environmental Division must be contacted to determine whether additional environmental review is required.

This Categorical Exclusion expires August 1, 2018. If all project work has not been completed by the expiration date, or if the need for an environmental compliance extension is anticipated, WAPA’s Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, work should be scheduled outside the February 1 to July 31 nesting period. If work is to be done during this period, contact WAPA’s Environmental Division at least 60-days before the work is scheduled so that they may arrange for a pedestrian survey to be conducted no more than 5 calendar days in advance of the project crews to identify active nests that are to be avoided.

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The Contractor shall not use any earth moving or blading equipment to make any improvements to the existing access roads. All vehicles used on the ROW access roads shall be rubber tired. If road improvements or staging areas are necessary, the Contractor shall submit a detailed description of the improvements to WAPA for environmental review and approval at least 60-days prior to construction.

WAPA has a clean vehicle policy intended to prevent the transport of non-native and invasive plants and animals, including noxious weeds and aquatic nuisance species. Operators will be required to thoroughly wash all vehicles and equipment (trailers, trucks, UTVs, etc.) before entering the action area and working on the project.

To minimize impacts to the environment and prevent damage to access roads, 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. Project work shall not be conducted 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.

The Contractor shall avoid ground-and vegetation-disturbing activities and shall limit the use of WAPA's ROW within the following spans of structures on the AU-WLD W Transmission Line: 46/3-46/5, 47/6-48/2, and 53/5-54/2. No fueling, pulling locations, staging, or storage areas will be placed within the aforementioned spans unless approved by WAPA. If the Contractor wishes to place fueling, pulling, staging, or storage areas within any of the aforementioned spans, the Contractor shall allow WAPA a minimum of 60-days, after receipt of the proposed site, to coordinate with the appropriate agencies and review and environmentally clear the area.

If any cultural resources are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the proposed action, work within 100-feet of the discovery area shall be halted immediately, WAPA's archaeologist shall be contacted, and the resource shall be evaluated by an archaeologist or historian who meets the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (36 CFR Part 61). Work in the area of discovery may not resume until notification is provided by WAPA's archaeologist.

If suspected human remains are encountered, work within a 100-foot buffer shall be halted immediately and WAPA's archaeologist shall be contacted immediately (no later than 24 hours after discovery) to initiate appropriate coordination. Work may not begin again in the area of the discovery of human remains for at least 30-days or until notified by WAPA's archaeologist.

The Contractor shall exercise care to preserve the natural landscape and shall conduct this project 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

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by construction operations and equipment. If operations or equipment cause terrain damage, WAPA or the Contractor shall repair the damage.

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: 17 April 2016

Brian Little
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. Extraordinary circumstances are unique situations presented by specific proposals, 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	X		

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preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases;			
(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 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:	X		
(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		

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(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		
(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		