

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Elmo-Hot Springs Fiber Optic Cable Installation

**Project No.:** P00032

**Project Manager:** Amanda Williams, TEP-TPP-1

**Location:** Lake and Sanders counties, 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 22 miles of fiber optic cable between Mission Valley Power's Elmo Substation and BPA's Hot Springs Substation. The fiber optic plan-of-service is required to improve BPA's telecommunications capacity to support safe and reliable operation of the transmission system. The fiber optic cable would be installed aerially on existing lattice steel towers along BPA's Flathead-Hot Springs 230-kilovolt transmission line.

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. BPA would utilize splice boxes mounted to the lattice steel structures in-lieu of concrete vaults along much of the fiber route; however, BPA would install two fiber optic cable vaults at both Elmo and Hot Springs substations. The vaults measure 4 foot-square x 4 feet-deep and would be partially buried next to the perimeter fence at each substation. BPA would also install eight fiber optic wood poles adjacent to existing lattice steel structures. All of these wood poles would be supported by guy anchors. Installation of the permanent wood poles and guy anchors would temporarily disturb about 300 square feet.

Approximately 1.5 miles 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 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 or replace five gates to reduce unauthorized access to the transmission line right-of-way and the properties it crosses. The total disturbance from access road work would be about 3 acres.

All disturbed areas would be restored to preconstruction conditions and revegetated with a regionally appropriate 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/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: January 5, 2017

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.

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### Project Site Description

The project site is located on BPA right-of-way within the Flathead Indian Reservation near the towns of Elmo and Hot Springs, Montana. Existing vegetation consists predominantly of grassland and sagebrush, with a small amount of Douglas-fir forest and alfalfa fields. Invasive weeds such as spotted knapweed and tumbled mustard are common. The surrounding landscape consists of open space, pasture and hay crops, and a few isolated residences.

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
<p><b>1. Historic and Cultural Resources</b></p> <p><u>Explanation:</u> BPA initiated a single consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT) for this project, as well as the proposed Kalispell-Kerr transmission line rebuild project. Due to potential adverse effects to traditional cultural properties associated with the Kalispell-Kerr project, BPA executed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the SHPO and CSKT on December 15, 2016.</p> <p><u>Mitigation:</u> Mitigation measures specific to the Elmo-Hot Springs fiber project identified in the MOA include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Implementing an Inadvertent Discovery Protocol in the event construction crews encounter previously unidentified cultural resources.</li> <li>✓ Requiring an archaeological monitor during ground-disturbing construction activities.</li> <li>✓ Conducting pre-construction cultural resource awareness training for all construction personnel prior to initiating ground-disturbing activities.</li> </ul>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>2. Geology and Soils</b></p> <p><u>Explanation:</u> Less than 0.1 acre of temporary disturbance for installation of fiber optic wood poles and vaults. About 3 acres of existing roads would be regraded and rocked.</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> </ul>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)</b></p> <p><u>Explanation:</u> There are no special-status species and no designated habitat present in the project area.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

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.

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



Explanation: Several small intermittent and ephemeral stream channels cross the fiber route; however, they are located between lattice steel structures where no ground-disturbing activities would occur.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: There are no wetlands within the proposed work areas; however, there are wetlands located between lattice steel structures where no ground-disturbing activities would occur.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed. Proposed wood pole installation 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.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The fiber optic cable would be attached to existing facilities within BPA right-of-way and would not alter or affect visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**



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

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Construction noise would be intermittent, temporary, and localized; there are less than five residences within 500 feet of the right-of-way. Construction would be limited to daytime hours (5:30 am-7pm).

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Project activities would improve human health or safety by enhancing safety and reliability of BPA's transmission system.

### **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 notified landowners of the proposed project and coordinated with individual landowners regarding the proposed fiber installation and road improvements.

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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: January 5, 2017