

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Emergency UHF Upgrade, Mount Spokane and Albeni Falls Radio Stations

Project Manager: Courtney Kimmel, TEP-CSB-2

Location: Spokane County, WA and Bonner County, ID

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

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to upgrade the existing digital UHF radios between Albeni Falls Radio Station (ALFR) in Bonner County, ID and Mt. Spokane Radio Station (SPOK) in Spokane County, WA with 7/8 GHz microwave radios. This project is in an emergency status because of the radio outages being operationally significant: failure of the Albeni Falls-Pine Street transfer trip (a power system protection circuit that routes over this radio link) now requires that the line section be removed from service when the radio fails. Upgrading the system would allow for redundancy, and thus ensure the dependability of power flow. Adding to the urgency is the need to complete the work before significant snowfall in the area.

All work is inside existing buildings and on existing towers. At SPOK, a new six-foot diameter 7/8 GHz microwave shielded dish antenna would be installed 46 feet high on the existing 70-foot-tall tower. Some antennas are being or have been removed from this tower in a separate BPA project. On the site's 50-foot tower, the existing 900MHz antenna being replaced by this project would be removed. Waveguide (corrugated copper tubing with black polyethylene jacket) would be installed from the antenna along the tower to the communication building and through an existing wall port. Inside the building, a fuse panel and associated wiring would be installed and an equipment rack would be outfitted with the new 7/8 GHz radios.

At ALFR, the existing 900 MHz antenna would be moved to a temporary position on the 88-foot-tall tower, below any other antennas on the structure. A new dish antenna – like the one at SPOK – would be mounted on the tower at the upper-most position. New waveguide would be installed from the new dish to the interior of the radio station. A new five-inch-diameter port would be cut in the building wall to accommodate the waveguide if no entrance ports are available for use. The upgraded radio would be installed in the existing BPA rack inside the radio building.

At both sites, the waveguide would be electrically-grounded at the tower tops, tower bases, and building entrances; grounding bars (small metal bars with welded wire to attach to the building's buried grounding mat) may need to be installed. Grounding may be required inside both buildings' interior ports as well.

All retired equipment would be recycled or disposed of in accordance with BPA waste management policies.

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/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel
Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: September 26, 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.

Proposed Action: Emergency UHF upgrade, Mount Spokane and Albeni Falls Radio Stations

Project Site Description

ALFR is situated near the Albeni Falls Power House at its namesake dam operated by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) on the Pend Oreille River, ID. SPOK is located in the State of Washington Department of Parks and Recreation (WA DPR) Mount Spokane State Park adjacent to the privately-operated Mt. Spokane Ski and Snowboard Park. The historic Vista House, a Civilian Conservation Corps-built structure, stands about 600 feet from the radio station.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. Historic and Cultural Resources	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> The BPA archaeologist determined the project would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties. The antennas would be added to existing arrays in established communication facilities and ground disturbance would be hand-digging of previously-disturbed ground.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> All work would be inside the fenced radio station yards. The hand-excavated pits for spot-welding to the grounding mats would extend no deeper than 18 inches through the graveled yard surfaces and the previously-disturbed soil and fill of the yards.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> All travel would be on established access roads and all work would occur inside the denuded, fenced station yards. No plants, including special-status species, would be affected.		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No impacts to wildlife, including special-status species, would be expected with the project. The level of activity and noise would not rise above typical maintenance projects at the sites, so wildlife in the vicinity should not be disturbed more than occurs during routine operation.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> The project would be located in the developed radio stations' footprints. Disturbed ground would be promptly restored to holes dug for grounding work to limit potential for off-site transport of sediment.		

- | | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 6. Wetlands | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> Ground-disturbing and associated sediment transport would be limited to the developed station yards. | | |
| 7. Groundwater and Aquifers | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> The hand-excavation would not extend past the 18 inches needed to access the grounding mat and therefore, would have no potential to impact groundwater or aquifers. | | |
| 8. Land Use and Specially Designated Areas | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> There are no concerns at ALFR, an operating radio station in a developed area near a dam. At SPOK, the site is on land owned by WA State Department of Parks and Recreation and is adjacent to the Mt. Spokane Ski and Snowboard Park and the historic Vista House. Because the project would consist of small-scale changes to antennas on an existing tower and building interior and exterior work all of which would be inside the radio station yard, there would be no impacts on the adjacent lands. | | |
| 9. Visual Quality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> The viewsheds would not be impacted at SPOK or ALFR. There would be one additional antenna dish at ALFR temporarily, and then the old dish would be removed after testing of the new dish. The tower at SPOK would have a new dish antenna, but this would not constitute an increase in recent dish numbers since the retirements of some radio communication components. | | |
| 10. Air Quality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> There would be no impact to air quality aside from limited duration vehicle exhaust during work access and egress along established routes. | | |
| 11. Noise | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> There would be temporary increases in localized noise around work activities taking place in the communication buildings and in the radio station yards. Noise levels would remain within the normal range for activities that would be manual in nature. | | |
| 12. Human Health and Safety | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <u>Explanation:</u> Public health and safety would not be impacted from the work that would be localized to restricted radio station grounds. Health and safety of construction personnel would not be adversely impacted as OSHA or BPA safety guidelines would need to be followed. The end result of the radio replacement would better ensure the dependability of the power system, constituting a health and safety benefit. | | |

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:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The WA DPR and the USACE are aware of the work and BPA's leases cover the type of work planned at the sites.

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

Signed: /s/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael O'Connell ECT-4

Date: September 26, 2017