



U.S. Department of Energy Categorical Exclusion Determination Form

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Proposed Action Title: Hazard Vegetation Removal along Central Arizona Project Transmission Lines in May, June & July 2018

Program or Field Office: Western Area Power Administration, Desert Southwest Regional Office

Location(s) (City/County/State): Maricopa & Mohave Counties, Arizona, San Bernardino County, California and Clark County, Nevada

Proposed Action Description:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Desert Southwest Region (DSW), plans to inspect and cut down hazard vegetation along five transmission lines associated with the Central Arizona Project (CAP) Power Systems: Black Mesa Parker, Topock Black Mesa, Davis Topock #2, Davis McCullough, and New Waddell Dam Westwing Transmission Lines. WAPA would drive motorized vehicles and all-terrain vehicles on existing unimproved access roads to patrol transmission line right-of-ways looking for tall vegetation. WAPA would measure the distance between the conductors and tall vegetation to determine if it encroaches on minimum clearance requirements. Vegetation that crosses the threshold is considered a hazard. WAPA would use hand tools (e.g., hand saws, chain saws) to cut down hazard vegetation. The resulting stumps would be no greater than four inches high. In rural settings, WAPA would either lop or chip the resulting woody debris and scatter it in the right-of-way. In urban areas, WAPA would take the debris to an existing approved landfill. No road work is planned. This work is needed to maintain the reliability and safety of the bulk electrical system.

WAPA plans to start the work on 5/7/2018 and complete it by 7/7/2018.

The transmission lines associated with this work cross Arizona State Land Department, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, National Park Service and private lands.

See Attached Continuation Sheet

Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied:

B1.3 - Routine maintenance

For the complete DOE National Environmental Policy Act regulations regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see Subpart D of 10 CFR Part 1021.

Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410(b): (See full text in regulation)

The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B to 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.

To fit within the classes of actions listed in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not: (1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders; (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; (3) 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; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (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 listed in paragraph B(5) of 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B.

There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.

The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. This 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 10 CFR 1021.211 concerning limitations on actions during preparation of an environmental impact statement.

Based on my review of the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as authorized under DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

NEPA Compliance Officer:

Date Determined:

5.4.18

Hazard Vegetation Removal along Central Arizona Project Transmission Lines in May, June & July 2018 Categorical Exclusion Continuation Sheet

Project Description (continued):

WAPA plans to conduct this work in conjunction with hazard vegetation removal actions along portions of eight transmission lines associated with the Parker Davis Power System. WAPA previously analyzed these activities in an environmental assessment (DOE/EA-1982) and issued a finding of no significant impact dated 9/30/2015; thus they were not reanalyzed here.

Special Conditions:

1. Biological Resources – Birds & Bats
 - a. Project activities shall not harm or harass individuals, eggs, nestlings, or active nests of species protected by federal law.
 - b. All trees before they are felled must be surveyed within seven (7) days of work to determine if there is an active bird or bat nest in them. If an active nest is of a species protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), or Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA), one of the following four (4) outcomes will follow:
 - i. The biological surveyor, in conjunction with Headquarters biologist, will determine the appropriate buffer avoidance distance and no work shall be performed within that buffer. Workers shall avoid the flagged environmental sensitive areas until a qualified biologist determines that the nest is no longer active.
 1. For ESA protected species such as the California least tern, Mexican spotted owl, southwestern willow flycatcher, yellow billed cuckoo and Yuma clapper rail, the biological surveyor shall establish a 100-foot-diameter buffer
 2. For MBTA protect species, the biological surveyor shall establish a 40-foot-diameter buffer.
 - ii. If WAPA has declared the tree is an “emergency situation,” the active nest (eggs or chicks) will be moved in accordance with DSW’s Special Purpose Utility permit authorized pursuant to the MBTA for MBTA-protected species.
 - iii. If the active nest is of an ESA species and it is an emergency situation, the Headquarters biologist will be contacted to conduct an emergency ESA consultation prior to work to authorize removal of the tree.
 - iv. For an eagle nest, work may not occur within 0.5-mile of an active nest. In Arizona, the eagle nesting season is approximately from late December to June 30. Golden eagles are widely distributed throughout the state’s mountain ranges and terrain with steep cliffs. Nests of bald eagles and golden eagles must be unoccupied for 10 years before they can be removed or destroyed. Therefore, if the pre-work biological survey

identifies an inactive eagle nest in a tree that needs to be removed, a BGEPA permit is necessary to remove that inactive nest prior to removal and the Headquarters biologist shall be contacted to obtain this permit.

2. Biological Resources – Desert Tortoise (Mohave Population)

- a. WAPA will implement the protection measures for a Category A activity as listed Programmatic Biological Opinion and Informal Consultation for WAPA West Area Operations and Maintenance Programs, Nevada, Arizona and California File # 84320-2015-F-0120 and 84320-2015-I-0121) dated 9/21/15, which are paraphrased below.
- b. Vehicle traffic will be restricted to designated access routes and the immediate vicinity of work areas. Vehicle speed will not exceed 25 mph access roads and 20 mph on unimproved access roads.
- c. No pets will be permitted at work areas.
- d. Workers will not feed wildlife.
- e. Desert tortoise mortalities or injuries associated with work related activities will be report to the Environmental Manager.
- f. A qualified biologist shall conduct pre-work surveys for Desert Tortoise (Mojave population in suitable habitat during the active season (3/1 to 10/31). Tortoise burrow and other sensitive features will be flagged and monitored for avoidance.
- g. A qualified biological monitor shall be present for work located in designated critical habitat for Desert Tortoise (Mohave Population). Tortoise burrow and other sensitive features will be flagged and monitored.

3. Cultural Resources

- a. If any cultural materials are discovered, work in the area shall halt immediately, DSW Regional Preservation Officer shall be contacted, and the material be evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983).