

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Tectonic Ridge Radio Tower Installation

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

Location: Salmon-Challis National Forest, Custer County, Idaho

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

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install an updated radio tower and equipment building adjacent to existing radio facilities on the summit of Grouse Peak South, on the Salmon-Challis National Forest, in Custer County, Idaho. BPA currently has its radio equipment on the State of Idaho’s (SOI) radio tower on the summit—the existing equipment consists of outdated UHF antennas that require replacement upgrades. BPA considered using the existing SOI radio tower for the upgrades; however the two existing UHF grid antennas weigh 38 pounds each and would be replaced with two microwave drums, weighing approximately 254 pounds each. The existing SOI tower was evaluated to determine if it has the structural capacity to hold BPA’s new antennas. The SOI tower was determined to be over capacity by a BPA structural engineer. The new BPA microwave drums would have a higher wind load and increase stress on the tower and foundation.

The new radio tower would be located approximately 100 feet east of the existing tower, would be a 100-foot tall lattice-steel structure installed on a 40-foot by 40-foot concrete pad. The associated equipment would be located in a new building with a 52-foot by 20-foot footprint, located north of the proposed tower. Two new 2,000 gallon propane tanks would be installed northeast of the proposed tower location.

Approximately 15 to 20 small Douglas fir trees would either be removed or modified (for the creation of habitat snags) to meet beam path requirements and safety setbacks from the tower and equipment building. There would be approximately 100 feet of trenching for fiber installation, from the new BPA equipment building to the existing SOI building, to the west. An additional 100 feet of trenching for power installation would occur from the BPA equipment building to an existing power pole, west of the project location. Staging for the project would occur in a 60-foot by 40-foot area, just northeast of the proposed tower facility, adjacent to the existing access road.

Minor improvements to the existing access road would be necessary to support construction equipment and vehicles. The proposed access road improvements would consist of installing a dip ditch, widening two turn-around locations and adding gravel to approximately 0.35 miles of access road between the two turnaround improvement areas.

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 Staffing & Recruiting

Reviewed by:

/s/ David K. Kennedy FOR

Gene Lynard
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Stacy L. Mason

Stacy L. Mason
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: 05/30/18

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.

Proposed Action: Tectonic Ridge Radio Tower Installation

Project Site Description

The project is occurring in the Salmon-Challis National Forest in Custer County, Idaho.

The location is on the summit of Grouse Peak South, which is currently developed with two radio towers and equipment buildings. Grouse Peak South is in Section 22 of Township 14 North, Range 20 East (Boise Meridian). The site is approximately seven miles east of Challis, Idaho. The site is in a shrub-steppe habitat, dominated with sagebrush and encroaching conifers. The new BPA radio tower at this site would be called Tectonic Ridge.

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"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> A Section 106 review concluded that there would be no adverse effects to historical or cultural resources. The Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with the determination on March 29, 2017. The US Forest Service, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Nez Perce Tribe, Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation, and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes—Fort Hall Indian Reservation were notified of the proposed project on May 3, 2016 and again on March 13, 2017. To date, neither the US Forest Service, nor any of the tribes have responded with interest in commenting on the project.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The maximum depth of soil excavation would be 10 feet. There would be approximately 0.25 acres of permanent ground disturbance for this project, and 0.10 acres of temporary disturbance, which would be revegetated after construction. An Erosion Control Plan would be implemented to prevent erosion and to stabilize soils after construction.</p>		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> A plant survey was conducted on June 17, and July 24, 2017, which concluded that there are no Forest Service Sensitive listed plants in or around the project area. There are no federally listed plants in Custer County.</p> <p>BPA is working with the US Forest Service's Native Plant Program to restore the site with native vegetation after construction has been completed. To compensate for loss of forb plants, the contractor will reserve excavated topsoil containing a seedbank, to redistribute (where appropriate) in disturbance areas after construction. Additionally, sagebrush (<i>Artemisia tridentate</i> ssp. <i>vaseyana</i>) seeds were collected in 2017 and are currently being grown out for planting at the site after construction.</p>		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Explanation: A Biological Evaluation was completed, which included the Salmon-Challis National Forest's sensitive species and it was determined that the proposed project would have no effect on any federally listed or special-status species.

The project site is designated as an Important Habitat Management Area for greater sage grouse. In compliance with USFS's requirements, the tower would have perch deterrents installed to prevent corvids from preying on greater sage grouse. Additionally, BPA would not begin construction until after June 15, to avoid impacting sage grouse hens and chicks.

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



Explanation: The project site is on a mountain top, above several headwaters of tributaries that drain into rivers that support migrating, spawning, and rearing of salmonid species and bull trout. The nearest tributary to the proposed tower location is 1,335 feet south. There is also an ephemeral stream, located approximately 120 feet from one of the access road improvement areas. While no sediments are anticipated to reach any waterways from the project, an erosion control plan and best management practices would be implemented to prevent erosion from soil disturbance during construction.

Per FEMA, the site is in a Zone D, which is defined as an unstudied area where flood hazards are undetermined, but flooding is possible. The site is at high elevation and is unlikely to flood.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: The project area does not contain any wetlands. A review of the National Wetland Inventory, soil information, topography, and aerial photos did not reveal any wetlands at the site. Additionally, two site visits were made during the summer of 2016, and wetland indicators were not found within the project area.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: The project would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

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



Explanation: There would be no permanent changes to land use at either location. The project area is already a USFS designated communications site.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The tower installation would not significantly change the visual quality at this location because it is already developed with radio towers. A viewshed analysis was conducted to determine the extent of visual impacts and it was concluded that the addition of another tower would have minimal impacts to the visual quality of the landscape.

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: There would be temporary construction noise during daylight hours; however, 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:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA has submitted to the US Forest Service, an application for Transportation and Utility Systems and Facilities on Federal Lands, Standard Form 299.

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
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Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
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Date: 05/30/18