



# U.S. Department of Energy

## Categorical Exclusion Determination Form

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Proposed Action Title: Integrated vegetation management actions to control unwanted plants at Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Desert Southwest Region (DSW) Western Communication Facilities in Arizona, California, and Nevada, 2018.

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

Location(s) (City/County/State): Arizona, Southern Nevada, Southeastern California

Proposed Action Description:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Desert Southwest Region (DSW), proposes to implement vegetation management actions at the following communication facilities: Christmas Tree Pass, Elden Mountain, Hualapi Mountain, Mingus Mountain, Mount Lemmon, Opal Mountain, Parker Dam, Pete Smith Peak, Texas Canyon, Towers Mountain, and White Tanks Mountain. Vegetation management in and directly surrounding each communication facility would involve mechanical and/or hand removal of unwanted invasive plant species to prevent further growth of these non-native species. This work is needed to maintain the reliability and safety of each communication facility which is part of the bulk electric system.

See Attached Continuation Sheet contains information about specific vegetation management and requirements for each communication facility.

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: Matthew D. Blevins Date Determined: 8/28/2018

Digitally signed by Matthew D. Blevins

Date: 2018.08.28 11:12:45 -06'00'

# Communication Facilities Vegetation Management

## Continuation Sheet

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### **Land Management Agency Permitting:**

WAPA will obtain and follow the conditions associated with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) or U.S. Forest Service (USFS) land and vegetation management protocols

### **Vegetation Management Non-Herbicide Use Application:**

Workers will use mechanical and/or hand tools to remove non-native invasive plant species in and around each communication facility. Vegetation may be cut or pulled to achieve a bare earth standard. Pulled vegetation will be removed off-site and disposed of properly.

WAPA will implement non-herbicide use applications at the following communication facilities:

#### 1. Christmas Tree Pass (BLM)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. This facility is within Mojave Desert tortoise designated critical habitat.
- b. An authorized Mojave Desert tortoise biologist will be onsite during all ground-disturbing project activities in suitable habitat during the active desert tortoise season (March 1-October 31). At other times, a qualified biological monitor may be present in place of an authorized biologist. The biologist(s) shall conduct pre-construction surveys for Mojave Desert tortoise in suitable habitat. The biologist(s) shall survey all work areas, including staging/laydown areas and access routes. Tortoise burrows and other sensitive features identified during the pre-construction survey shall be flagged and monitored by the biologist for avoidance.
- c. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- d. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.
- e. If there is an active nest or presence of Southwestern Willow Flycatcher birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

## 2. Elden Mountain (USFS)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. Mechanical removal of non-native vegetation is only allowed during the period of September to March. March to August is normal breeding season for the Mexican Spotted Owl and its critical habitat, therefore, no vegetation removal shall be allowed.
- b. If Mexican Spotted Owls and their nests are present then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

## 3. Hualapai Mountain (BLM)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. Use hand tools and do not cut plants any lower than 6-inches tall per the request of the Bureau of Land Management. This will minimize soil erosion.
- b. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- c. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.
- d. If there is an active nest or presence of California Least Tern or Yellow-billed Cuckoo birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

## 4. Mingus Mountain (USFS)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility.
- b. A qualified botanist/biologist will conduct surveys prior to vegetation removal in order to determine presence of Arizona cliffrose plants.
- c. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- d. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.

e. If there is an active nest or presence of southwestern willow flycatcher and yellow-billed cuckoo birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

5. Mount Lemmon (USFS)

a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. Mechanical removal of non-native vegetation is only allowed during the period of September to March. March to August is normal breeding season for the Mexican Spotted Owl and its critical habitat, therefore, no vegetation removal shall be allowed.

6. Opal Mountain (BLM)

a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. This facility is located within Mojave Desert tortoise designated critical habitat.

b. An authorized Mojave Desert tortoise biologist will be onsite during all ground-disturbing project activities in suitable habitat during the active desert tortoise season (March 1-October 31). At other times, a qualified biological monitor may be present in place of an authorized biologist. The biologist(s) shall conduct pre-construction surveys for Mojave Desert tortoise in suitable habitat. The biologist(s) shall survey all work areas, including staging/laydown areas and access routes. Tortoise burrows and other sensitive features identified during the pre-construction survey shall be flagged and monitored by the biologist for avoidance.

c. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.

d. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.

e. If there is an active nest or presence of Yuma Clapper Rail and Southwestern Willow Flycatcher birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

7. Parker Dam (WAPA & BOR)

a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. This facility is located within Mojave Desert tortoise designated critical habitat.

b. An authorized Mojave Desert tortoise biologist will be onsite during all ground-disturbing project activities in suitable habitat during the active desert tortoise season (March 1-October 31). At other times, a qualified biological monitor may be present in place of an authorized biologist. The biologist(s) shall conduct pre-construction surveys

for Mojave Desert tortoise in suitable habitat. The biologist(s) shall survey all work areas, including staging/laydown areas and access routes. Tortoise burrows and other sensitive features identified during the pre-construction survey shall be flagged and monitored by the biologist for avoidance.

8. Pete Smith Peak (BLM)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility.
- b. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- c. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.
- d. If there is an active nest or presence of yellow-billed cuckoo birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

9. Texas Canyon (AZ)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. This facility is located within suitable habitat for the Chiricahua leopard frog and norther Mexican garter snake.
- b. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- c. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.
- d. If there is an active nest or presence of northern aplomado falcon and yellow-billed cuckoo birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

10. Towers Mountain

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility. Mechanical removal of non-native vegetation is only allowed during the period of September to March. March to August is normal breeding season for the Mexican Spotted Owl and its critical habitat, therefore, no vegetation removal shall be allowed.

11. White Tanks Mountain (BLM)

- a. No herbicide use will be applied at this communication facility.

- b. If possible, schedule work in the fall and winter between October 1 and March 31 in order to avoid impacts to active bird nests.
- c. If work must occur in the spring or summer between April 1 and September 30 then bird surveys must be conducted prior to vegetation management and a biological monitor must be present during these activities work.
- d. If there is an active nest or presence of Yuma Clapper Rail, California Least Tern or Yellow-billed Cuckoo birds then no vegetation will be removed within 100-feet of their nests. Bird surveys must be conducted 7-days prior to start of work.

### **Biological Resource Concerns**

WAPA's Environmental Team shall provide environmental awareness training to all Contractor field personnel at a kickoff meeting or a training session at the start of each contract year. The environmental awareness training shall include information on desert tortoise, Mexican Spotted Owl, migratory birds, and other special status species.

The Contractor shall not cause injury or death to nesting birds, active nests, eggs, or nestlings. In general, breeding birds and active nests are likely to be encountered between February 15 and August 1. If evidence of a nesting bird is discovered in the project area:

- a) The Contractor shall immediately stop work within 40-feet of the nest and notify the COR with the location and nature of the findings. The Contractor shall not continue work in the avoidance area until directed to do so by the COR;
- b) The COR shall coordinate with WAPA's Environmental Team relative to active nest discoveries and any recommended actions; the COR shall provide notice to proceed to the Contractor after WAPA's internal coordination is complete.

### **Cultural Resource Concerns:**

Removing vegetation with hand tools is an Exempt activity pursuant to Stipulation III.A and Appendix B.A.18 and Appendix B.D.2 of the 2013 programmatic agreement for routine maintenance and minor construction developed pursuant to section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.