

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Vehicle Barrier Installation at the Mount Hebo Communications Site

Project Manager: Bryan Donaldson, TFLC-CHEMAWA

Location: Yamhill County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B2.5 Facility safety and environmental improvements; B1.20 Protection of cultural resources, fish and wildlife habitat

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to install a temporary, vehicle barrier near the Mount Hebo communications site. Before the 7-foot-long wood rail fence segment was vandalized and ultimately removed, it prevented vehicles and ATVs from entering a sensitive meadow habitat. Since removal of the fence, a new two-track roadway into the meadow has been established by trespassers. The immediate installation of a vehicle barrier (e.g. large boulder set on top of the existing gravel surface or install a line of up to ten metal T-posts) in the location where the wood fence segment was previously located, would secure the site, until a permanent, more robust fencing solution can be implemented. The project area is about 1 foot wide by 7 feet long.

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, Jul. 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/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Katey C. Grange</u>	<u>June 14, 2022</u>
Katey C. Grange	Date
NEPA Compliance Officer	

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: Vehicle Barrier Installation at the Mount Hebo Communications Site

Project Site Description

The project site is located on Mount Hebo, in the northern Coast Range of Oregon. The site is located in T4S, R9W Section 23, Willamette Meridian, about 10 miles east of the Pacific Ocean and about 40 miles northwest of Salem. Mount Hebo is located on lands administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service (USFS) and is primarily comprised of dense, forest stands of second growth western hemlock and Douglas-fir. A 65-acre meadow complex spans along a 2-mile stretch of Mount Hebo's ridgeline near the summit. A five-facility communications complex, including the BPA Mount Hebo communications site, is located along the eastern edge of one of the meadows. The project site about 1 foot wide by 7 feet long, and is located between the western edge of the BPA Mount Hebo communications site and the eastern edge of the 9-acre meadow. The nearest wetland is about 2,300 feet southeast of the project area, and the nearest stream is about 700 feet east of the project area. No freshwater designated critical habitats are located within 1 mile of the project area.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA historian and archaeologist reviewed the proposed action and determined that the undertaking is a type of activity that does not have the potential to cause effects on historic properties, assuming such historic properties were present. The historian and archaeologist issued a memo documenting this determination on June 13, 2022.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In total, the proposed action would result in less than 1 square foot of ground disturbance in a previously disturbed, gravel vehicle parking area. Therefore, impacts to geology and soils would be negligible.

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There are no documented occurrences of any state-listed, special-status, or federally-listed plant species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) within the project area. Vegetation surveys determined that the coast range fawn lily (*Erythronium elegans*), a federal Species of Concern and a US Forest Service Sensitive species, is located at Mount Hebo. Also, the early blue violet (*Viola adunca*), a host plant for the Oregon silverspot butterfly [*Speyeria zerene hippolyta*], was documented during vegetation surveys in BPA's gravel parking lot and around the communications site. However, the coast range fawn lily

and the early blue violet are not located within the project area. Therefore, the proposed project would not impact state-listed, special-status, or federally-listed ESA plant species. Native and non-native plant species, including ox-eye daisy (*Lecantherum vulgare*), lupine (*Lupinus* spp.), St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), and tansy ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*) have established in the gravel parking lot due to infrequent vehicle usage and lack of routine vegetation maintenance at the site. Some of these plant species may be temporarily damaged by foot traffic during the proposed action.

Notes:

- Vegetation surveys identified the locations of coast range fawn lily and early blue violets outside of the project area, and they will be avoided while approaching the project area.

4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) and the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*), both federally-listed species under the ESA, have the potential to occur at Mount Hebo. Both species have designated critical habitat at Mount Hebo. The Oregon silverspot butterfly, also a federally-listed species, is known to lay eggs on early blue violet plants at Mount Hebo near the communications site. The Oregon silverspot butterfly does not have designated critical habitat at Mount Hebo.

In accordance with section 7 of the ESA, BPA requested formal consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and received a Biological Opinion (BiOp) on November 2, 2020 (TAILS: 01EOFW00-2021-F-0046) for BPA's Mount Hebo Communications Site Project, which included a fence replacement/vehicle barrier installation component. While the larger communications site redevelopment and construction project has been delayed, the vehicle barrier component needs to be implemented immediately to deter vehicles and ATVs from entering the sensitive meadow habitat.

In the BiOp, the USFWS concluded that the proposed Mount Hebo Communications Site Project (including the fence replacement/vehicle barrier installation component) would not jeopardize the continued existence of the Oregon silverspot butterfly, so long as specific terms and conditions are met, including adherence to a list of avoidance and mitigation measures. Furthermore, USFWS concurred with a May Effect, Not Likely to Adversely Affect determination for the marbled murrelet, and for the designated critical habitat of the marbled murrelets and the northern spotted owl. BPA made a No Effect determination for the northern spotted owl.

The proposed action would result in a negligible amount of ground disturbance in the graveled vehicle parking area. Some vegetation has grown in the gravel due to lack of vegetation maintenance at the site. However, vegetation surveys determined that early blue violets, the host plant for the butterfly, are not located in the project area. No suitable wildlife habitat would be altered as a result of the proposed action. Therefore, the proposed project would not impact state-listed, special-status, or federally-listed ESA wildlife species.

Ambient noise levels in the local area are relatively quiet. Noise from the proposed action (especially installing T-posts with a driver) may temporarily disturb wildlife in the local area for up to two hours; however, they are expected to return upon project completion.

Notes:

- The following measures apply to the proposed action:
 - Equipment, vehicles, clothing, and boots, to be brought to Hebo must be inspected for cleanliness, and deemed weed-free prior to driving up Mount Hebo Road to the communications site.
 - Between July 1 and Sept. 30, vehicle speeds must not exceed 5mph in roadway sections that are adjacent to open meadow habitat.

- Locations where early blue violets have been documented must be avoided at all times, unless an emergency situation arises where vehicle access and/or foot traffic access in those specific areas is required to remedy the situation.
- Vehicle tires must stay on gravel surfaces.
- Prior to commencing work, the field crew to perform the proposed action must be briefed by the environmental protection specialist on the environmentally sensitive areas and the natural resource concerns at Mount Hebo. Furthermore, maps and GIS layers of the environmentally sensitive areas must be provided to the field crew.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area does not contain any water bodies, floodplains, or surface connectivity to fish-bearing streams. Therefore, the project would not impact water bodies, floodplains, or fish.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area does not contain any wetlands. Therefore, the project would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance associated with the proposed action is negligible, and would not reach depths of groundwater or an aquifer. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project area is located within a USFS designated Scenic Biological Special Interest Area. The installation of a temporary vehicle barrier would be consistent with the approved uses of the Special Interest Area and the USFS's Communications Site Plan. No land use changes are proposed.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While a large boulder would be a more natural looking feature than T-posts, neither of these proposed vehicle barriers would substantially change the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There may be a small amount of vehicle emissions during project activities; however, there would be no substantial changes to air quality after the proposed action is complete.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Vehicle use and installation activities would create noise above current ambient conditions. However, noise impacts would be temporary (up to 2 hours) and intermittent. There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following installation activities.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed during project activities; therefore, project activities would not impact human health or safety.

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: N/A

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: N/A

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: N/A

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: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA's environmental protection specialist coordinated with wildlife biologists and botanists from the USFWS and USFS in May and June 2022, and the USFS landscape architect in May 2022.

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

Signed: /s/ *Becky Hill* *June 14, 2022*
Becky Hill Date
Environmental Protection Specialist