

Bonneville Power Administration

# memorandum

DATE: August 28, 2012

REPLY TO  
ATTN OF: KEC-4

SUBJECT: Environmental Clearance Memorandum

TO: Frank Weintraub  
Project Manager – TEP-TPP-1

**Proposed Action:** Silver Butte Fiber Burial Project

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):**  
B.47 Fiber Optic Cable.

**Location:** Kootenai National Forest, Lincoln and Sanders County, Montana

**Proposed by:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA)

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA proposes to bury an approximately 1-mile-long overhead fiber optic line (fiber) segment located along the Noxon-Libby transmission line. Under the Proposed Action, the fiber would be buried within the BPA right-of-way (ROW) and a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) access road. Past snow and ice loading along the segment has resulted in past failures of the overhead fiber, causing outages that compromise BPA's system reliability. Typically, line maintenance crews are dispatched to repair the communication system during the worst winter weather conditions, which places personnel in hazardous conditions which may cause serious physical harm or death. The existing fiber has fallen from the transmission towers and is currently laying on the ground, which makes the fiber vulnerable to damage.

To increase the reliability of the fiber and to prevent future communication outages, BPA proposes to bury fiber from structure 11/5 to structure 12/5 on the Noxon-Libby transmission line. BPA proposes to bury the fiber within the access road bed (FS-2220/594) located in the ROW from structure 11/5 to structure 12/2. The fiber would then continue to be buried within the FS-2220/594 access road bed, but off of the transmission line ROW, until intersecting the transmission line ROW slightly southeast of structure 12/3. The fiber would then be trenched in the existing transmission line ROW between structure 12/3 and structure 12/5.

The fiber would be placed in one of two 2-inch-diameter High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) conduits that would be buried approximately 42 to 48 inches below ground. The second conduit would be available as a spare for an emergency restoration. No blasting would be required and no trees would be removed for the project. In relatively flat portions of the project area, open trench plow methods would be employed. A plow would be used to open a 42- to 48-inch-deep seam for the HDPE conduit placement. The plow would then backfill the seam as HDPE conduit is placed, leaving less than a foot of surface disturbance width. BPA anticipates the use of this method for installation in the access road from structure 11/5 to the access road crossing of the ROW southeast of structure 12/3. On steep slopes, a cat would winch down a mini excavator to excavate an approximate 48-inch-deep, 18-inch-wide trench to accommodate the new fiber.

Materials excavated for trenching would be used to backfill. This method is anticipated to be required between the access road crossing of the ROW southeast of structure 12/3 and structure 12/5. Vaults are typically positioned at ground level and provide a point for pulling the underground fiber. Three vaults that are 4-foot-wide by 4-foot-long by 4-foot-deep would be installed next to structures 11/5 and 12/5 and where the conduit would depart FS-2220/594 to enter the ROW.

Steel enclosure boxes that are 2.5-feet-wide by 3-feet-tall by 1-foot-deep would be placed on structures 11/5 and 12/5 approximately 20 feet off of the ground to connect the aerial fiber to the buried fiber.

### **National Historic Preservation Act Compliance**

On March 2, 2012, BPA initiated Section 106 consultation with the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe of the Flathead Reservation, Blackfeet Tribe, and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho. Due to a project modification, BPA submitted a follow-up letter on April 9, 2012. A cultural resource survey was conducted by a qualified archaeologist along the proposed project route on July 9, 2012. The subsequent cultural resource report determined that the proposed project would have no adverse effect to historic properties. BPA sought concurrence from the consulted parties on July 27, 2012. The Montana SHPO concurred with report findings in their letter dated August 13, 2012. The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe of the Flathead Reservation, Blackfeet Tribe, and Kootenai Tribe of Idaho concurred with the report findings on August 22, 2012 and August 27, 2012.

### **Endangered Species Act (ESA) Compliance**

The following species are ESA-listed for the Kootenai National Forest: white sturgeon, grizzly bear, Spalding's campion, Canada lynx (including critical habitat), and bull trout (including critical habitat). The project area does not contain suitable habitat for white sturgeon, bull trout, or Spalding's campion. Canada lynx and grizzly bear were identified as potentially occurring within the project area. After further analysis, it was determined that the project would have no effect on Canada lynx as the project would not result in a change to lynx habitat components, no increase in access or recreation, and no destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat.

Several impact minimization measures would be implemented to reduce grizzly bear impacts to an insignificant level. To minimize bear attractants, workers would follow the Kootenai National Forest Food Storage Order. To minimize vehicle traffic and the duration of open roads, workers would carpool to reduce the number of vehicle trips behind the locked gate on FS-2220/594. The number of vehicle trips during construction would be restricted to no more than 46 round trips between June 16 and September 15. The number of vehicle trips would be restricted to no more than 38 round trips between September 15 and November 30.

A Biological Assessment (BA) was completed for the purpose of evaluating potential impacts to Canada lynx and grizzly bear. A May Affect, but Not Likely to Adversely Affect determination for grizzly bear and a No Effect determination for Canada lynx was made by the US Forest Service in their BA dated May 29, 2012. The United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided concurrence with the determinations in a letter dated June 26, 2012.

### **Clean Water Act Compliance**

As the proposed Project would be located at a topographical divide and based on BPA reconnaissance, project trenching would not cross any waterbodies or wetlands. One, intermittent waterbody crosses FS-2220/594 outside of the trenching area and ROW. This portion of the road

may be crossed by workers accessing work areas. BPA would temporarily span the waterbody above ordinary high water mark to avoid any waterbody impacts.

**Findings:** BPA has determined that the proposed action complies with Section 1021.410 and Appendix B of Subpart D 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). The proposed action does not present any extraordinary circumstances that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. The proposal is not connected [40 C.F.R. 1508.25(a)(1)] to other actions with potentially significant impacts, has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion, is not related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts [40 C.F.R. 1508.25(a)(2)], and is not precluded by 40 C.F.R. 1506.1 or 10 C.F.R. 1021.211. Moreover, the proposed action would not (i) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, (ii) require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities, (iii) disturb hazardous substances, pollutants, contaminants, or Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that pre-exist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases, (iv) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, or (v) 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.

Based on the provisions identified on the attachment, this proposed action meets the requirements for the Categorical Exclusion referenced above. We therefore determine that the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further NEPA review and documentation.

/s/ Katey Grange

Katey Grange

Environmental Project Manager

Concur:

/s/ Stacy Mason

Stacy Mason

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: August 28, 2012

Attachments:

Provisions

Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions

## Provisions

This categorical exclusion would meet the following provisions:

- An environmental specialist would be appointed who would be responsible for ensuring all Best Management Practices (BMPs) are met.
- All construction crews would observe proper storage of food, garbage, and other attractants within grizzly bear habitat as specified in the Kootenai National Forest Food Storage Order (Special Order, Kootenai National Forest, 2001; Occupancy and Use Restrictions and Food Storage for the Cabinet/Yaak Ecosystem).
- All waste/trash generated during construction would be collected, removed, and disposed legally off-site.
- Use of high intensity motorized disturbance (such as heavy equipment or helicopter use) would not occur between April 1 and June 15 during the grizzly bear den emergence and spring period.

Workers would carpool to minimize the number of vehicle trips behind the locked gate on FS-2220. The number of vehicle trips would be restricted to no more than 46 round trips between June 16 and September 15. The number of vehicle trips would be restricted to no more than 38 round trips between September 15 and November 30.

- BMPs would be implemented during construction, such as air or water washing construction vehicles prior to entering the site, to avoid or minimize the spread of weeds.
- Where possible, vegetation and soil resources would be preserved by minimizing disturbance to the vegetative cover and root system. Construction vehicles and equipment would be kept on access roads, structure sites, and work areas.
- Disturbance to white bark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*) should be avoided to the maximum extent practicle.
- BMPs would be employed where applicable to minimize erosion, soil sloughing, and other surface alterations during the construction and restoration phase.
  - Minimize the disturbance area on steep slopes as much as practical.
  - Repair trenched roads and restore and stabilize any off access road areas that were trenched, disturbed by reel equipment and pull box installation, spoil areas, and tracks and ruts from equipment. Re-seeded areas would be covered in durable bio-degradable erosion control blankets (ECBs) and stakes. BPA's contractor would install slope breakers perpendicular to flow direction at appropriate intervals to prevent water channeling. Slope breaker outfalls would be directed to stable, well vegetated areas.
  - Install trench breakers at appropriate intervals to ensure that the trench does not act as a preferential pathway for groundwater flow.

- Reseed disturbed area with rough bentgrass, *Agrostis scabra*, or an alternate seed mix developed through coordination with the USFS.
- Appropriate emergency spill response materials would be maintained at each active work area to control unexpected releases of petroleum-based products or other hazardous materials. Emergency spill response materials would also be provided in each piece of equipment and in each vehicle on the project. Emergency supplies would be in an easily accessible location and clearly marked. Any spill material would be disposed of in accordance with applicable state and federal requirements.
- Any spilled petroleum-based products or other hazardous materials would be immediately cleaned up and properly disposed. The BPA inspector, BPA environmental contact, and the USFS would be notified immediately.
- Span the small waterbody that crosses access road FS-2220/594 with steel plates, which would not result in disturbance within the waterbody ordinary high water mark.
- The BPA Inadvertent Discovery Protocol for cultural resources would be followed during construction. The BPA inspector, BPA environmental contact, and the USFS would be notified immediately.

## Environmental Checklist for Categorical Exclusions

Name of Proposed Project: Silver Butte Fiber Burial

Work Order #: 00308472

**This project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts on the following environmentally sensitive resources. See 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B for complete descriptions of the resources. This checklist is to be used as a summary – further discussion may be included in the Categorical Exclusion Memorandum.**

<u>Environmental Resources</u>	<u>No Potential for Significance</u>	<u>No Potential, with Conditions (describe)</u>
1. Historic Properties and Cultural Resources In the unlikely event that archaeological material is encountered during the implementation of this project, a BPA archaeologist will immediately be notified and work halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed. Montana SHPO, USFS, and the appropriate Tribes will be notified of any future findings.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2. T & E Species, or their habitat(s) Construction shall be completed in accordance with the measures described in the Project's biological opinion (and summarized in the CX provisions) to ensure that the project is not likely to adversely affect grizzly bear.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3. Floodplains or wetlands	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Areas of special designation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Health & safety	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Prime or unique farmlands	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Special sources of water	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Other (describe)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

List supporting documentation attached (if needed):

Signed: /s/ Katay Grange

Date: August 28, 2012