

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Happy Camp–Hilltop Radio Path Replacement Project

Project No.: P00797

Project Manager: Kevin Briggs TEPO-CSB-2

Location: Modoc County, California

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

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to replace an existing radio path between Hilltop Substation and Happy Camp Radio Site in Modoc County, California. The Hilltop Substation is owned by Nevada Energy (NV Energy) and is located on land administered by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM); the Happy Camp Radio Site is owned by Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) and is located on the Modoc National Forest, which is administered by the U.S. Forest Service. BPA currently leases space for its existing radio equipment at each facility from NV Energy and PG&E.

To replace the existing beam path, BPA would do the following:

Happy Camp Radio Station

- Replace the 6-foot diameter high performance (HP) antenna facing Hilltop Substation with an 8-foot HP antenna. Both antennas would need to be operational for a cutover period before the 6-foot antenna is permanently removed. The new antenna would be replaced at the same height as the existing antenna.
- Install an ice bridge between the existing tower and an unused entry port on the southeast corner of the communication building. The ice bridge is a structure that supports the cables connecting the antennas and transmitters inside the communication building. Holes for two posts to support the ice bridge would be hand dug, approximately 1-foot wide and 3-feet deep (one near the tower and one near the building).
- Install two breakers, router, and additional electronic equipment inside the existing communication building.

Hilltop Substation

- Replace the 8-foot diameter grid antenna facing Happy Camp Radio Station with an 8-foot HP antenna. Both antennas would need to be operational for a cutover period before the 8-foot grid antenna is permanently removed. The new antenna would be replaced at the same height as the existing antenna.
- Install two breakers, router, and additional electronic equipment inside the existing communication building.

- Cut down up to 40 western juniper trees that either currently obstruct the radio beam path, or could grow into the beam path in the next 20-30 years. The trees to be cut are all located on BLM land within 2.5 miles of the Hilltop Substation. All trees would be cut by hand with a chainsaw. Approximately 30 of the trees are located in areas with no road access, in which case tree cutters would access the trees on foot, lop and scatter the trees and limbs, and leave the debris in place. The remaining trees located near existing access roads would be hauled off-site for disposal.

Antenna and equipment installation is tentatively scheduled to begin May 2017 and would be complete by November 2017. Tree cutting would occur in fall 2016 or winter 2017.

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/ Justin Moffett

Justin Moffett

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: March 31, 2016

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: Happy Camp–Hilltop Radio Path Replacement Project

Project Site Description

Proposed location is primarily within the fenced and graveled yards surrounding the Hilltop Substation and Happy Camp Radio Site. Tree removal would be dispersed along the 2.5 mile segment of the radio beam path consisting of open grassland interspersed with stands of western juniper trees.

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"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Since there would be no ground disturbance in native soil and the radio facilities are less than 50 years old, there is no potential to affect historic properties. Therefore, BPA did not initiate Section 106 consultation with California State historic Preservation Office or tribes for this action.		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> Minimal soil disturbance within graveled area surrounding the Happy Camp Radio Site. No soil disturbance would occur at Hilltop Substation.		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No special-status species present.		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> No special-status species present.		
5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> None present within a 0.5-mile radius of Happy Camp Radio Site or Hilltop Substation.		

6. **Wetlands**

Explanation:

None present.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Explanation:

None present.

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

Explanation:

No change to existing land use; not a specially designated area.

9. **Visual Quality**

Explanation:

The new radio antennas would be visually consistent with the existing antennas and would not be located in a visually sensitive area.

10. **Air Quality**

Explanation:

Small amount of dust and vehicle emissions during construction.

11. **Noise**

Explanation:

Temporary construction noise during daylight hours. No sensitive noise receptors near the project site.

12. **Human Health and Safety**

Explanation:

To reduce the risk of wildfire associated with slash accumulation from tree removal, BPA would require its vegetation contractor implement the following specifications:

- 1) Lop and scatter debris such that slash depths are less than 18 inches above the ground.
- 2) Cut tree branches from at least two sides of the main stem to allow the main stem to lay flat on the ground.
- 3) Cut the stems, branches and broken tops over 6 inches in diameter into lengths of 6 feet or less.
- 4) Remove debris resulting from this Project from roadways, cut-slopes, ditches and watercourses.
- 5) Scatter debris down-slope from roads and place on stable locations.

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 coordinated with the U.S. Forest Service, BLM, NV Energy, and PG&E during all phases of project planning.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Moffett
Justin Moffett ECT-4

Date: March 31, 2016