

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Kennewick Communication Site Upgrades

Project No.: P01237/ P00834

Project Manager: Molly Kovaka TEP-CSB-2/Ben Younce TEP-CSB-1

Location: Benton County, WA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.7 Electronic equipment; B1.31 Installation or relocation of machinery and equipment

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to upgrade its Kennewick communication site, located in Benton County, Washington, by 1) replacing the existing back-up engine generator and associated controls and ventilation system to ensure a reliable back-up power source for BPA's communication equipment; and 2) replacing BPA's aging VHF radio system with a simple, modern radio system with improved voice coverage across BPA's service area. All work would take place within the fence of the existing communication site yard.

Engine Generator (EG) elements:

The existing 45-kW generator and associated equipment would be replaced with a 50-kW generator and associated exhaust piping, muffler, automatic and manual transfer switches, propane exhaust fan, high temperature exhaust fan with insect screen and wind baffle, iWatch control (for secure network connection and remote monitoring), alarm panel, and cables. The door frame to the communication building would be removed to accommodate the larger generator; the frame would be replaced in its original position following generation installation. Any walls or door frames damaged during work would be repaired and repainted as needed.

A small segment of the propane line to the generator would be replaced-- a one-foot by one-foot by one-foot hole would be hand dug immediately adjacent to the exterior of the generator building in order to replace the propane line. The existing propane tank would remain in service and would be cleaned and painted.

Communications elements:

The work to improve the mobile communications elements would be implemented over three years. In spring 2016, a grounding bar and polyphaser lightning protection would be installed in the communication building. Both would be bonded to the buried grounding mat between the antenna tower and the communication building. The building's existing charger rack would be replaced to accommodate equipment to be installed later.

In 2017 or 2018, electronic equipment supporting the radio system *backhaul* data network (a system of communications equipment – radios, fiber, phone lines – that takes information from remote field sites back to BPA's core communication network and control centers) would be installed in new or existing communications racks.

By 2019, two new antennas and coaxial cable would be installed on the existing tower, and new coaxial boot assembly kits would be installed at the building's exterior ports to support coaxial runs. New VHF radios (repeaters) would be installed in the communications building and connected to the previously-installed antennas and coaxial cable. The old antennas and radio equipment would be retired from the site and either disposed of or returned to inventory for spares/parts. And, the East System node *controller* (hardware that aggregates multiple VHF signals from the region and controls the flow of voice traffic) would also be installed if needed.

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/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Stacy L. Mason
Stacy L. Mason
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 13, 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: Kennewick Communication Site Upgrades

Project Site Description

The Kennewick Radio Station is located on an open ridgetop about five miles south of Kennewick, WA. Surrounding land use is mainly agricultural while the higher elevation on which the station is situated is considered semi-desert with typical associated native and exotic invasive herbaceous and small woody plant species. Another common land use in the area is developed wind farms. Water features in the vicinity are intermittent in nature, with man-made canals more distant, and the Columbia River over seven miles away.

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> The BPA archeologist initiated consultation with Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the Umatilla and Yakama Tribes on October 29, 2015. The archeologist performed a pedestrian survey on November 14, 2015 and determined the project would not affect historic properties. DAHP concurred with BPA's "no historic properties affected" determination on January 25, 2016. The tribes did not respond to initiation or to the determination.</p>		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> All work would be inside the fenced radio station yard. The two hand-excavated pits for spot-welding to the grounding mats would extend 18 inches through the graveled yard surface and the previously disturbed soil and fill of the yard. The propane line excavation pit would extend 12 inches through the yard ground. All soil and fill disturbed during the work would amount to less than a cubic yard and would be replaced in-situ.</p>		
3. Plants (including federal/state special-status species)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Northern wormwood is a federal listing candidate species that could occur in the project location. Because the work would take place in the denuded, fenced yard, and access would be on well-maintained roads, there would be virtually no potential for the project to impact this or the state-listed species (threetip sagebrush, Wyoming big sagebrush) that could be present.</p>		
4. Wildlife (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> There would be no impact from the project to wildlife. Species of concern potentially occurring in the area: the federally-listed threatened yellow-billed cuckoo and the state-listing candidate townsend's ground squirrel, do not have suitable habitat in the direct impact zone of the project (the enclosed yard and buildings). The yellow-billed cuckoo requires wooded riverine valleys and therefore would not be vulnerable to any incidental impacts as the project is on a dry ridge. Though the townsend's ground squirrel could occur in the immediate vicinity of the project, the work would remain in the developed footprint and noise or ground</p>		

vibrations would be minimal due to the manual nature of the labor and tools.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish**

(including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)



Explanation: The project would be located in the developed radio station footprint that is situated on a dry ridgetop with only intermittent stream beds nearby. Work would also be taking place in the dry early summer season so any runoff concerns would be minimized. Bull trout are a federally-listed threatened fish in the general vicinity, but salmonid-bearing streams are not near the site (the closest is the Columbia River at seven miles), and materials disturbed at the site would be inconsequential and limited to the radio station yard.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: There are no wetlands in the project's zone of potential impact.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: The hand-excavation would not extend past the 18 inches needed to access the grounding mat and propane line and would therefore have no potential impact on groundwater or aquifers.

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



Explanation: There would be no impact to land use or specially designated areas. The ridgetop on which the station is situated hosts multiple radio tower stations and the surrounding area is dominated by agricultural and wind power generation land uses.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The antennas that would replace existing antennas would be largely similar in appearance. The whip-style antennas that would be installed on the existing tower would not impact visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: There would be no impact to air quality. There could be a marginal improvement in short-term air quality when the new engine generator would be used in place of the older, less efficient model.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: There would be temporary increases in localized noise around work activities to take place in the communication building and in the radio station yard. It would be expected that noise levels would remain within the normal range expected for activities that would be manual in nature.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Public health and safety would not be impacted from the work that would be localized to restricted-area radio station fenced grounds. Worker health and safety would not be adversely impacted as OSHA guidelines would be followed as a term of the contract and as protocol of BPA employees' work.

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: The Kennewick radio station is fully-owned by BPA and the work is small in scope so there is no need for notification, involvement, or coordination.

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

Signed: /s/ Michael J. O'Connell

Date: May 13, 2016