

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

**Blue Ridge Microwave Site Upgrade Project
Grand and Summit Counties, Colorado**

A. **Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes three maintenance actions within previously disturbed or developed areas to upgrade electric service and improve system reliability for the Blue Ridge Microwave Site (Site) in Grand County, Colorado. Western's proposed actions are: installation of a new electric service distribution arrangement at the Site, replacement of three defective single pole wooden structures on the Green Mountain-Blue Ridge (GM-BLR) 2.4-kilovolt (kV) distribution line, and removal of trees to improve Western's microwave line-of-sight path.

- Western's GM-BLR 2.4-kV distribution line provides electric service to several communication buildings at the Site. Four entities (Western, U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Bureau of Land Management/U.S. Forest Service, and Call-Com) have communication buildings using electricity for their radio equipment. Western proposes to rebuild the existing electrical connections at the Site providing electric service to the communication buildings. The rebuild would replace the existing pole-mounted transformer and install new electric meters to allow better monitoring of electrical usage at each building. Western would install a meter cabinet with new electric meters to monitor the electric service received by each entity.

Western would install two 35 foot poles, adjacent to the existing single wood pole with transformer and meter, to make a wooden H-frame structure to support a new pole mounted transformer, metering cabinet with electric service meters, and ancillary electrical equipment. From the meters, Western would install new underground service laterals and disconnect switches for each communication building at the Site. The service laterals would be placed in trenches, approximately 4 inches wide and 2 feet deep. Each building at the Site will have a dedicated meter. Once the new H-frame structure, transformer, meter cabinet, and laterals are installed, the existing single wood pole with old transformer and meter and existing H-frame would be removed.

- Western would replace three defective single wood pole structures (3-3, 4-3, and 4-4) with three new structures on its existing GM-BLR 2.4-kV distribution line in Grand and Summit Counties, Colorado. The new structures would be placed along the current alignment within 10 feet of the existing structures. The holes for the new poles at Structures 4-3 and 4-4 would be hand dug. The two new wood poles would be flown and set in their new location using a helicopter. Structure 3-3 would be replaced using a rubber-tired pressure digger. An existing vehicle parking area near the intersection of Colorado Highway 9 and County Road 381 would be used as a helicopter and equipment staging area.
- Approximately 12 trees (both dead and alive) would be removed to improve Western's microwave line-of-sight path.

B. **Number and Title of the Categorical Exclusion Being Applied:** (See text in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.)

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

Blue Ridge Microwave Site Upgrade Project Grand and Summit Counties, Colorado

B4.6. Additions and modifications to transmission facilities.

Additions or modifications to electric power transmission facilities within a previously disturbed or developed facility area. Covered activities include, but are not limited to, switchyard rock grounding upgrades, secondary containment projects, paving projects, seismic upgrading, tower modifications, load shaping projects (such as the installation and use of flywheels and battery arrays), **changing insulators, and replacement of poles, circuit breakers, conductors, transformers, and crossarms.**

C. Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410 (b): (See full text in regulation and attached checklist.)

1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix A or B to Subpart D.

For classes of actions listed in Appendix B, the following conditions are integral elements. To fit within a class, the proposal must not:

- Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders;
- 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;
- 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;
- Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order, statute, or regulation by Federal, State, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to those listed in paragraph B. (4) (see Attachment A).

2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect *the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal*.

3) The proposal is not “connected” to other actions with potentially significant impacts, is not related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts, and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211.

D. Special Stipulations Pertaining to the Proposal:

If the scope of work of this project changes, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for additional environmental review.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION
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This Categorical Exclusion is valid for 3 years after the signature date. If construction has not commenced within that time, Western's Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review prior to construction.

If any cultural materials are discovered during construction, work in the area shall halt immediately, Western and the Colorado SHPO staff shall be contacted, and the material be evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983).

Western shall exercise care to preserve the natural landscape and shall conduct this maintenance operation to prevent any unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the project vicinity. Except where clearing is required for permanent works, approved construction roads, or excavation operations, vegetation shall be preserved and shall be protected from damage by Western's construction operations and equipment.

To minimize impacts to potentially buried cultural resources and prevent damage to access roads, operation of off-road equipment will not be permitted during periods of heavy rains, when soils are wet, or when excessive soil damage may occur due to unsuitable operating conditions. No construction or routine maintenance activities shall be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support construction equipment. If equipment creates ruts in excess of six inches deep, the soil shall be deemed too wet to adequately support construction equipment.

Any excess soils from trenching to be scatter on the existing roads.

No new road construction or major repairs of existing roads are authorized.

Trees would be cut at ground level, bucked and limbed so the trunk of the tree lays flush with the ground with limbs scattered. The slash will be less than 24 inches in depth and not piled on standing tree trunks.

The Forest Service will be notified prior to commencement of work.

- E. Determination:** Based on my review of information provided to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, I determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class of actions, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is categorically excluded from requirements for an EA or an EIS.

Signature Gene Iley, Jr.

Date: 7/3/12

Gene Iley, Jr.
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
Western Area Power Administration

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

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ATTACHMENT A

**Conditions That Are Integral Elements of the Classes
of Actions in Appendix B That Apply to This Proposal**

Checklist for Categorical Exclusion Determination, revised Nov. 2011

Application of Categorical Exclusions (1021.410)	Disagree	Agree	Unknown
(b)(1) The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in appendix B to subpart D.		X	
(b)(2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. Extraordinary circumstances are unique situations presented by specific proposals, including, but not limited to, scientific controversy about the environmental effects of the proposal; uncertain effects or effects involving unique or unknown risks; and unresolved conflicts concerning alternate uses of available resources.		X	
(b)(3) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. Segmentation can occur when a proposal is broken down into small parts in order to avoid the appearance of significance of the total action. The scope of a proposal must include the consideration of connected and cumulative actions, that is, the 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 § 1021.211 of this part concerning limitations on actions during EIS preparation.		X	
B. Conditions that are Integral Elements of the Classes of Actions in Appendix B.	NO	YES	Unknown
(1) Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.	X		
(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;	X		
(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;	X		
(4) Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been	X		

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION
Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

Blue Ridge Microwave Site Upgrade Project
 Grand and Summit Counties, Colorado

identified as needing protection through Executive Order, statute, or regulation by Federal, state, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to:			
(i) Property (such as sites, buildings, structures, and objects) of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance designated by a Federal, state, or local government, or property determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places;	X		
(ii) Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat (including critical habitat) or Federally-proposed or candidate species or their habitat (Endangered Species Act); state-listed or state-proposed endangered or threatened species or their habitat; Federally-protected marine mammals and Essential Fish Habitat (Marine Mammal Protection Act; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act); and otherwise Federally-protected species (such as under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act or the Migratory Bird Treaty Act);	X		
(iii) Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, —Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);	X		
(iv) Areas having a special designation such as Federally- and state-designated wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national natural landmarks, wild and scenic rivers, state and Federal wildlife refuges, scenic areas (such as National Scenic and Historic Trails or National Scenic Areas), and marine sanctuaries;	X		
(v) Prime or unique farmland, or other farmland of statewide or local importance, as defined at 7 CFR 658.2(a), —Farmland Protection Policy Act: Definitions, or its successor;	X		
(vi) Special sources of water (such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources that are vital in a region); and	X		
(vii) Tundra, coral reefs, or rain forests; or	X		

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

Blue Ridge Microwave Site Upgrade Project
Grand and Summit Counties, Colorado

(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 of the Department of Agriculture, the Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Institutes of Health.	X		
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