

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

Ault-Craig 345-kV Transmission Line Vegetation Management Weld, Larimer and Jackson Counties, Colorado and Albany County, Wyoming

- A. **Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to survey and inspect all areas along the Ault-Craig 345-kV Transmission Line, managed by the Eastern Colorado Maintenance Office, to conduct routine vegetation management inspection and danger tree removal on the transmission line. The work is scheduled to occur from the Ault Substation near Structure Numbers 0/1 through 97/1. Trained crews will measure electrical clearance distances between the conductor and tree branches and cut down any trees that meet or exceed the allowable clearance distance. Any danger trees and vegetation that constitute an electrical hazard to the lines will be removed. Individual trees will be cut, lopped, and scattered within the existing right-of-way. Also proposed is routine maintenance to clear vegetation in and around transmission structures, as needed, to ensure access to the structures. Vegetation that is 50 feet-or-less from transmission structures will be managed. Activities will be completed using non-ground disturbing equipment. Crews will consist of two to five persons. Equipment used will include pickup trucks, rubber-tired chipper, laser measuring devices, ropes, and chainsaws. All travel will be confined to existing rights-of-way access roads. Only rubber-tired vehicles will be used.
- B. **Number and Title of the Categorical Exclusion Being Applied:** (See text in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.)

B1.3 Routine Maintenance:

Routine maintenance activities and custodial services for buildings, structures, **rights-of-way**, infrastructures (including, but not limited to, pathways, roads, and railroads), vehicles and equipment, and **localized vegetation and pest control**, during which operations may be suspended and resumed, provided that the activities would be conducted in a manner in accordance with applicable requirements. Custodial services are activities to preserve facility appearance, working conditions, and sanitation (such as cleaning, window washing, lawn mowing, trash collection, painting, and snow removal). Routine maintenance activities, corrective (that is, repair), preventive, and predictive, are required to maintain and preserve buildings, structures, infrastructures, and equipment in a condition suitable for a facility to be used for its designated purpose. Such maintenance may occur as a result of severe weather (such as hurricanes, floods, and tornados), wildfires, and other such events. Routine maintenance may result in replacement to the extent that replacement is in-kind and is not a substantial upgrade or improvement. In-kind replacement includes installation of new components to replace outmoded components, provided that the replacement does not result in a significant change in the expected useful life, design capacity, or function of the facility. Routine maintenance does not include replacement of a major component that significantly extends the originally intended useful life of a facility (for example, it does not include the replacement of a reactor vessel near the end of its useful life). Routine maintenance activities include, but are not limited to:

- (a) Repair or replacement of facility equipment, such as lathes, mills, pumps, and presses;
- (b) Door and window repair or replacement;
- (c) Wall, ceiling, or floor repair or replacement;
- (d) Reroofing;
- (e) Plumbing, electrical utility, lighting, and telephone service repair or replacement;
- (f) Routine replacement of high-efficiency particulate air filters;
- (g) Inspection and/or treatment of currently installed utility poles;

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- (h) Repair of road embankments;
- (i) Repair or replacement of fire protection sprinkler systems;
- (j) Road and parking area resurfacing, including construction of temporary access to facilitate resurfacing, and scraping and grading of unpaved surfaces;
- (k) Erosion control and soil stabilization measures (such as reseeded, gabions, grading, and revegetation);
- (l) Surveillance and maintenance of surplus facilities in accordance with DOE Order 435.1, "Radioactive Waste Management," or its successor;
- (m) Repair and maintenance of transmission facilities, such as replacement of conductors of the same nominal voltage, poles, circuit breakers, transformers, capacitors, crossarms, insulators, and downed powerlines, in accordance, where appropriate, with 40 CFR part 761 ("Polychlorinated Biphenyls Manufacturing, Processing, Distribution in Commerce, and Use Prohibitions") or its successor;
- (n) Routine testing and calibration of facility components, subsystems, or portable equipment (such as control valves, in-core monitoring devices, transformers, capacitors, monitoring wells, lysimeters, weather stations, and flumes);
- (o) Routine decontamination of the surfaces of equipment, rooms, hot cells, or other interior surfaces of buildings (by such activities as wiping with rags, using strippable latex, and minor vacuuming), removal of contaminated intact equipment and other materials (not including spent nuclear fuel or special nuclear material in nuclear reactors); and
- (p) Removal of debris.

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).

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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 Office must be contacted for additional environmental review.

This Categorical Exclusion (CX) is valid for the 2015 calendar year. If vegetation management has not commenced within that time, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review prior to construction.

Environmentally sensitive areas that are to be avoided will be identified on maps provided to the project manager.

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

For the sections of the line that cross the Medicine Bow-Routt and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forests, the conservation measures to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects noted in the Biological Assessment/Evaluation (BA/E) submitted to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (February 29, 1013) will be followed. Specific stipulations from the BA/E will be provided to the project manager.

Where the line crosses BLM lands, several BLM sensitive species have been found: the Boreal Toad, Northern Leopard Frog and Mountain Plover. If encountered, these species should be avoided. To further protect the species on BLM lands, work in or near ponds, water bodies including streams and wetlands/wet meadows will be avoided, especially from December to June. Additional BLM recommended measures to protect these species are already included in this CX.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), maintenance work should be scheduled outside the March 1 through July 31 general nesting periods. If the maintenance work is to be done during March 1 through July 31, contact Western’s Environmental Division so that they may arrange for a pedestrian survey to be conducted in advance of the maintenance crews to identify active nests that are to be avoided. In addition to MBTA nests on BLM land, the area must also be surveyed for Mountain Plover nests from April 10 to July 10.

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To protect various bird species, including the Mountain Plover and Sage-grouse, traffic and speed should be limited and if possible, avoid work from one-half an hour before sunrise to two hours after sunrise, and from one hour before sunset to sunset between April 10 and June 1. On BLM lands, the periods from one-half hour before sunrise to 9:00 a.m. and from 5:00 p.m. to one-half hour after sunset should be avoided from June 1 to June 31.

To minimize impacts to the environment 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 maintenance activities shall be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support equipment. If equipment creates ruts in excess of 6 inches deep, the soil shall be deemed too wet to adequately support the equipment.

Crews shall exercise care to preserve the natural landscape and shall conduct this danger tree operation to prevent any unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the project vicinity. Except where clearing is required for danger tree and brush removal, vegetation shall be preserved and shall be protected from damage by Western's vegetation management operations and equipment.

Western has a clean vehicle policy and all equipment used must be cleaned prior to use in order to prevent transporting of invasive plant or noxious weed seeds. Operators will be required to wash all machinery (trailers, trucks, skid steer loaders, etc.) before entering the action area and working on the project to prevent transport of non-native invasive species within the transmission line corridor.

The contractor or Western will notify the landowners before proceeding with work.

- E. Determination:** Based on my review of information provided to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, I have 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

Date: 2 NOV 2015

Brian Little
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
Western Area Power Administration

Prepared by: Daniel Borunda

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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, 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 identified as needing protection through Executive Order, | X | | |

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| <p>statue, 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:</p> | | | |
| <p>(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;</p> | X | | |
| <p>(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);</p> | X | | |
| <p>(iii) Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, —Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);</p> | X | | |
| <p>(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;</p> | X | | |
| <p>(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;</p> | X | | |
| <p>(vi) Special sources of water (such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources that are vital in a region); and</p> | X | | |
| <p>(vii) Tundra, coral reefs, or rain forests; or</p> | X | | |

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| (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 | | |
|---|---|--|--|