

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION



Western Area
Power Administration
Rocky Mountain Region

Proposed Action Title: Hayden-Gore Pass (HDN-GOT) 230-kV Transmission Line Vegetation Management (Machine Work)

Location: Grand and Routt Counties, Colorado

Project Number: 2021-030

Expiration Date: December 31, 2024

A. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Rocky Mountain Region (RMR), proposes to conduct routine vegetation management along its Hayden-Gore Pass (HDN-GOT) 230-kV Transmission Line. Routine vegetation management will be conducted within WAPA's right-of-way (ROW) in Grand and Routt counties, Colorado, between Structures 128 and 224. Work will occur on public lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). The intent of WAPA's vegetation management program is to secure and maintain a manageable and stable ROW that minimizes vegetative threats to transmission system safety, security, and reliability, and ultimately does not require frequent re-treatments. Achieving a desired condition is a process that may require several treatments over an extended period of time. Once a desired condition is achieved, the desired condition will be proactively maintained. WAPA's desired condition, as stated in *WAPA Order 450.3C*, is consistent with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 Part 7 and the minimum vegetation clearance distances (MVCD) as defined by North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) standard FAC-003-4. The intent of this proposed activity is to continue to move the ROW closer to, or actively maintain, WAPA's desired condition. This action will be performed in accordance with the *Operations Plan for Western Area Power Administration Rocky Mountain Region Electrical Facilities Located on National Forest System-managed Lands*.

This proposed activity will enlist trained vegetation management crews to assess the ROW condition, identify incompatible vegetation, and trim and remove incompatible vegetation, including danger trees as defined in *WAPA Order 430.1C*, using the appropriate means for the terrain and vegetation type. Appropriate means of vegetation removal may include equipment such as masticators, hydro-axes, bucket trucks, skid-steer loaders with brush-hog attachments, mulchers, chippers, chainsaws, pickup trucks, ATVs, measuring equipment, and associated forestry tools. The transmission line will be accessed via existing access routes; no road maintenance or new road construction is authorized.

B. STIPULATIONS PERTAINING TO PROPOSAL:

- 1) If the scope of work of this project changes, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted to determine whether additional environmental review is required.
- 2) This Categorical Exclusion expires on **December 31, 2024**. If all project work has not been completed by the expiration date, or if the need for an environmental compliance extension is

anticipated, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted for an updated environmental review.

- 3) RMR's Environment Department must be contacted immediately if a dead or injured Canada lynx is encountered on WAPA's right-of-way.
- 4) The RMR Vegetation Management Program must coordinate with RMR's Environment Department and the USFS to report the number of acres of lynx habitat removed within WAPA's right-of-way as a result of this vegetation management activity. This requirement must be met to ensure compliance with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's 2014 Biological Opinion for WAPA's Routine Maintenance and Vegetation Management Practices in Colorado, Nebraska, and Utah. Reporting is required for vegetation management between Structures 128 and 192 (Lynx Pass Lynx Analysis Unit).
- 5) Vegetation management crews must carefully inspect vegetation for active avian nests prior to any vegetation management activities between May 15 and August 15. Vegetation must be inspected no more than five (5) calendar days in advance of vegetation management activities during this time period. If an active avian nest is found in vegetation that needs to be trimmed or removed, vegetation management activities must be delayed until the nest is no longer active. An avian nest becomes active when the first egg is laid, and it remains active until all offspring have fledged (left the nest) and the nest is empty. Inactive (empty) nests that do not belong to threatened species, endangered species, or eagles may be removed and destroyed in accordance with WAPA's Avian Protection Plan (APP). Contact RMR's Environment Department prior to nest removal to ensure conformance with the APP.
- 6) Any injured or orphaned birds and all observed active nests must be immediately reported to RMR Environment at (970) 593-8803 or (970) 342-6462. Any dead birds must be reported to RMR Environment within twenty-four (24) hours of discovery. Additional documentation, such as photographs and GPS coordinates, may be requested to support RMR's reporting requirements to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- 7) Only cutting or removing of vegetation above the ground (e.g. with a chainsaw, rotary cutter, or mower) is allowed within Waters of the United States (within wetland boundaries and below the ordinary high-water mark of surface waters). Within these areas, all stumps and roots must be left in place to minimize soil disturbance. No mechanized pushing, dragging, or other activities that would add or remove soil or create significant debris piles (e.g. brush or slash piling) is authorized within these areas.
- 8) Cultural resource avoidance areas are identified on maps to be provided to WAPA's maintenance crews and/or Contractor. The maintenance crews and/or Contractor must only use hand tools (e.g. chainsaws) within cultural resource avoidance areas. No heavy machinery (e.g. masticator) is allowed within these areas. All access within cultural resource avoidance areas must be limited to existing access roads, and no brush piling within these areas is allowed. If brush piling, the use of heavy machinery, or off-road vehicular access within cultural resource avoidance areas is necessary, an RMR Archeologist must be contacted at (970) 302-4753 or (970) 286-3523. No brush piling, heavy machinery use, or



off-road vehicular access within cultural resource avoidance areas is authorized until written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.

- 9) If any cultural resources are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the proposed action, work within 100 feet of the discovery area must halt immediately, and an RMR Archaeologist must be contacted immediately at (970) 302-4753 or (970) 286-3523. Work in the area of discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 10) If any possible human remains are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the proposed action, work within 100 feet of the discovery area must halt immediately, and an RMR Archaeologist must be notified immediately at (970) 302-4753 or (970) 286-3523 (no later than 24 hours from the time of discovery). A reasonable effort must be made to protect the remains from looting and/or further damage. Work in the area of discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 11) If culturally modified trees are encountered during implementation of the proposed action, an RMR Archaeologist must be contacted at (970) 302-4753 or (970) 286-3523. No removal or trimming of these trees is authorized until written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 12) To prevent the transport of non-native and invasive plants and animals, including noxious weeds and aquatic nuisance species, work crews must thoroughly wash all vehicles and equipment (trailers, trucks, UTVs, etc.) before entering the action area and working on the project.
- 13) Activities involving the use of fuel, oil, hydraulic fluid, or other petroleum products must comply with RMR's Spill Response Plan (SRP).
- 14) Herbicide application is not authorized under this CX. If herbicide application is required, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted for an updated environmental review.
- 15) Per the *Operations Plan for Western Area Power Administration Rocky Mountain Region Electrical Facilities Located on National Forest System-managed Lands*, the following design features (DFs) and standard maintenance practices (SMPs) will be implemented:
 - DF 2: Equipment and vehicles that show excessive emissions of exhaust gases due to poor engine adjustments, or other inefficient operating conditions, shall not be operated until corrective repairs or adjustments are made.
 - DF 5: Operate heavy equipment only when soil moisture is below the plastic limit or protected by at least 1 foot of packed snow or 2 inches of frozen soil. Soil moisture exceeds the plastic limit if the soil can be rolled into a 3-millimeter (0.12-inch) thread without breaking or crumbling.
 - DF 7: Chipped material depth could be limited based on further coordination with the USFS. Areas exceeding depth and cover limits should be respread.
 - DF 14: Equipment staging areas and refueling locations will be at least 250 feet away from streams and wetlands.



- DF 17: For trees felled within riparian buffers:
 - Trees should be directionally felled away from streams and wetlands in areas immediately next to culverts (within 50 feet) or when trees are too small to be sufficiently anchored and could create problems during high flows by being transported downstream and potentially blocking culverts.
 - Trees large enough to be anchored and that could provide instream aquatic habitat should be felled directly across the stream. This simulates natural conditions and provides a large woody component to the stream for aquatic organisms and fisheries habitat. In perennial streams, the Forest Service will decide which trees will be felled across the stream and used for habitat, and which will be felled away from the stream.
 - Trees should be removed using at least one-end (partial) suspension.
 - Trees should not be skidded across perennial or intermittent stream courses.
- DF 35: Green woody conifer debris under 4-inch diameter can be lopped and scattered to minimize insect populations. Green pine or fir tree debris over 4-inch diameter needs to be removed, burned, chipped or bucked to 4 feet lengths to minimize species in pines or western balsam bark beetles in subalpine fir. Spruce and Douglas-fir tree boles over 8-inch diameter need to be removed, debarked, or bucked to 2 feet lengths to minimize risks of spruce beetle or Douglas-fir beetle build-up.
- DF 44: Material, including tops, limbs, boles, non-salvageable trees, and other woody material, resulting from tree felling or removal operations should be treated to a fuels profile that promotes surface fire behavior of less than 4-foot flame lengths (maximum fire line intensity of 100 BTU/ft/s) under the average severe fire weather conditions. To achieve the desired surface fire behavior, the resulting fuel bed should show one of the following:
 - Low fuel loading such as that represented under Fuel Models (FM) such as Timber Litter (TL) 3, TL 5, FM8, or FM9.
 - A highly compacted fuel bed generally no more than 18 inches (crushed, chipped, masticated², or lopped and scattered. For reference to fuel models see (Scott and Burgan 2005) and (Anderson 1982).
- DF 50: Slash and debris will be kept out of road ditches and drainage channels.
- SMP P-1: Ensure that workers are conspicuous by requiring bright clothing and hardhats.

C. NUMBER AND TITLE OF THE CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION BEING APPLIED:

(See text in 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D.)

B1.3 Routine maintenance

D. REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS 10 CFR 1021.410 (b): (See full text in regulation)

The proposed action fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B of 10 CFR 1021.

To fit within the classes of actions listed in Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not:



(1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of the Department of Energy (DOE) or Executive Orders; (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; (3) disturb hazardous substances; pollutants; contaminants; or Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (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.

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

The proposal has not been improperly segmented, and 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.

E. DETERMINATION:

Based on my review of information conveyed to me and in my possession (or attached) concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as authorized under DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Signature and Date

James Wood
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Region
Western Area Power Administration

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