

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION



Proposed Action Title: Blanket CX for Routine Communication System Maintenance Activities

Location: Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming

Project Number: 2021-037

Expiration Date: December 31, 2026

A. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION:

The Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Rocky Mountain Region (RMR), conducts routine communication system maintenance activities at existing facilities in seven states (Arizona, Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming). These activities are part of the day-to-day operation of WAPA's infrastructure.

The following activities occurring **within the existing fenced perimeter of a substation or switchyard and at existing communication sites** are covered by this Categorical Exclusion (CX):

- (1) Installation, repair, replacement, and removal of aerial communications equipment (microwave radios, antennas, tower lighting systems, microwave dishes, parabolic dishes, and surveillance/security systems) on existing communication towers, structures, and buildings;
- (2) Maintenance and replacement of battery banks;
- (3) Maintenance, servicing, testing, and replacement of communications equipment within communication and control buildings;
- (4) Maintenance of above ground propane tanks;
- (5) Repair and replacement of ground mats, not to exceed current depth of disturbance;
- (6) Replacement and repair of footings for communications equipment, not to exceed current depth of disturbance;
- (7) Maintenance and repair of buildings and structures less than 45 years old;
- (8) Pest management within buildings;
- (9) Maintenance, installation, and removal of a solar power array panel and controller from structures;
- (10) Installation, relocation, and removal of poles, cable trays, and associated equipment, not to exceed current depth of disturbance;
- (11) Clearing vegetation by hand; and
- (12) Grounds maintenance including snowplowing, mowing, and servicing septic tanks, not to exceed current depth of disturbance.

The following activities occurring **within the existing fenced perimeter of a substation or switchyard, at existing communication sites, and within RMR's existing rights-of-way (ROWs) and on documented access roads and easements** are covered by this CX:

- (13) Activities to manage nuisance wildlife as covered under Interagency Agreements between RMR and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services;

- (14) Installation and repair of fiber optic cable, where pulling sites or ground disturbance are not required;
- (15) Installation, repair, and replacement of fiber optic splice enclosures, where ground disturbance is not required;
- (16) Parking a fiber optic splice trailer, where ground disturbance is not required;
- (17) Repair, replacement, and removal of existing fences and gates, where existing postholes are reused and no new postholes are required; and
- (18) Other closely related activities that have little or no environmental or cultural resource impacts or regulated materials concerns as determined by RMR's Environment Department (**requires submission of a Project Initiation Form [PIF] per Stipulation B.2**).

B. STIPULATIONS PERTAINING TO PROPOSAL:

- 1) Activities listed in **Section A, Items 1 through 17**, that will adhere to all Stipulations in Section B **do not require submission of a PIF** to RMR's Environment Department.
- 2) Activities listed in Section A, Items 1 through 17, that will not adhere to all Stipulations in Section B, and other closely related activities (**Section A, Item 18**), **require submission of a PIF** to RMR's Environment Department. If approved, RMR's Environment Department will provide written approval for use of this CX.
- 3) **This CX is valid until December 31, 2026**, or until an updated version is executed by RMR's Environment Department, whichever comes first.
- 4) 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.
- 5) Work crews must carefully inspect vegetation for active avian nests prior to any vegetation management activities between May 15 and August 15 (alternate dates may be used if justified). 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 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) 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 written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.

- 7) 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 written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 8) 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.
- 9) Pesticide applicators must meet all state licensing requirements and must follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines. Applicators must use only EPA-registered pesticides and herbicides that are approved for the intended use and location, and must follow all applicable label directions.
- 10) Handling and disposal of lead-based paint, asbestos, PCB, and other environmentally regulated materials must comply with local, State, and Federal regulations.
- 11) Activities involving the use of fuel, oil, hydraulic fluid, or other petroleum products must comply with RMR's Spill Response Plan (SRP).

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

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

B1.3 Routine maintenance
 B1.7 Electronic equipment
 B1.11 Fencing

B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers
 B4.7 Fiber optic cable

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.

**JAMES
WOOD**

Digitally signed by
JAMES WOOD
Date: 2021.03.04
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Signature and Date

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

