Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Carr-Keswick 230-kV off ROW Weed Control

Project No.: 100153025

Project Manager: Ricardo Velarde

Location: CAR-KE 230-kV Whiskeytown NRA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action:

Western Area Power Administration, Sierra Nevada Region (WAPA) is responsible for the operation and maintenance of several federally owned and operated transmission lines throughout California, including Carr-Keswick 230-kV line (CAR-KE), located in the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. Part of this responsibility includes ensuring WAPA maintains reliable access to transmission towers and other facilities to comply with the National Electric Safety Code, Western States Coordinating Council, and WAPA directives for protecting human safety and maintaining the reliable operation of the transmission system.

WAPA proposes to apply herbicide at the recommended prescribed rate for weed control targeting Diffuse Knapweed on the CAR-KE 230kV off ROW and access roads, as needed from towers: mid span 1/2-1/3, 1/3-1/4, 1/4-1/5, 4/4-4/5, and 4/6-5/1 within the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. The work required is the application of herbicides and no mechanical treatment of weeds at these locations will be allowed. A photo-degrading dye will indicate where material has been sprayed unless otherwise directed by National Park Service. WAPA will apply herbicides under National Park Service (NPS) guidance in accordance with the NPS Integrated Pest Management Program. WAPA will only use herbicides on nonnative and invasive plants. Restrictions and guidance listed on the herbicide label will be followed. Equipment will be calibrated to ensure proper mixture and volume of herbicide and the proper nozzle tip will be selected to prevent overspray. Herbicides will be handled to avoid accidental spills and ensure worker and public safety. Herbicide application methods will be adjusted based on wind speed and direction, which may include avoiding application on windy days when drift potential is greatest.

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, Jul. 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), WAPA 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, WAPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Signed: Latisha M. Saare Digitally signed by Latisha M. Saare Date: 2021.02.26 09:14:25 -08'00' Date: 2/26/21

Attachment: 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: Carr-Keswick 230-kV off ROW Weed Control

Project Site Description

The proposed project area is in the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area in Shasta County, California.

Equipment staging areas would be on roads and within the ROW whenever possible.

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**	☑	☐

Explanation:

No ground disturbance would take place. All work would be covered under the "Programmatic Agreement Among WAPA the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the California State Historic Preservation Officer Concerning Emergency and Routine Maintenance Activities and Other Routine Activities at WAPA Facilities in California," revised March 2010.

2. **Geology and Soils**

Explanation: ☑ ☐

Ground disturbance is not anticipated in this project; therefore, no impacts would occur.

3. **Plants** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Explanation: ☑ ☐

Desktop and in-field studies revealed there are no federally protected special status species anticipated in the project area. The project area does contain suitable habitat for three state-protected species and two California Native Plant Society rare plants. A bloom season survey conducted in May of 2020 determined none of the rare plants were present within the project footprint. WAPA will employ project conservation measures to avoid potential impacts to state-protected species and other sensitive biological resources.

Vehicles and equipment shall be pressure or steam washed in order to remove non-native plant seeds before entering Whiskeytown National Recreation Area.

4. **Wildlife** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Explanation: ☐ ☑

For the protection of migratory birds, if planned activities occur between January 1 and September 15, migratory bird nest surveys will be required prior to project activities. If a nest is detected, an appropriate buffer will be marked in which all O&M activities and herbicide applications will be prohibited from January 1 to September 15 or until nestlings have fledged. A standard nest buffer of 50 feet (250 feet for raptors) will be used, unless otherwise indicated by the surveying biologist. If work must be conducted within these buffers, a WAPA supplied biological monitor will be on site. If the monitor determines activities are likely to cause impacts, project activities shall be postponed or adjusted until nestlings have fledged, the nest is no longer active, or activities are not likely to cause impact. Nesting surveys can be conducted up to 3 weeks prior to project activities.

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

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Explanation: ☐ ☑

Within 100 feet of a seep, spring or stream, the following are prohibited: vehicle access except on existing access roads, mixing of herbicides, and open petroleum products. Equipment will be stored, fueled, and maintained in a vehicle staging area 300 feet or the maximum distance possible from any seep, spring, stream, or their associated habitats. Vehicles will be inspected daily for fluid leaks before leaving resource area. When feasible, all maintenance activities will be routed around wet areas while ensuring that the route does not cross sensitive resource areas.

6. **Wetlands**
Explanation: ☐ ☑

Vehicle access will only be permitted on well-established roads unless soils are dry. Only overland travel approved in advance by NPS and WAPA Environment is permitted. If vegetation management activities are proposed within 250 feet of a seasonal wetland a biological monitor will be present and/or a qualified biologist will clearly mark the limits of the feature(s) or appropriate buffers. A qualified biologist will clearly flag a 50-foot buffer around all seasonal wetland features. Mixing or application of herbicides will be prohibited within 250 feet of seasonal wetland features.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**
Explanation: ☑ ☐

Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities. The project would not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**
Explanation: ☑ ☐

The land use would not change at the project site. The project is located within the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area. The area has a Mediterranean climate, characterized by hot, dry summers and damp to wet, mild winters.

9. **Visual Quality**
Explanation: ☑ ☐

The visual quality would be consistent with the existing use of the transmission right-of-way corridor. There would be no significant change to the visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**
Explanation: ☐ ☑

This section describes procedures adopted by WAPA to support the state implementation plan to restore air quality in the region. The contractor is expected to adopt the following:

AQ-SOP-1: The Contractor will adhere to all applicable requirements of those agencies having jurisdiction over air quality matters, and any necessary permits for O&M will be obtained.
AQ-SOP-2: Machinery and vehicles will be kept in good operating condition and older equipment will be replaced with equipment meeting applicable emission standards; appropriate emissions-control equipment will be maintained for vehicles and equipment, per EPA and/or WAPA air-emission requirements.
AQ-SOP-3: Idle equipment will be shut down when not in active use; visible emissions from stationary generators will be controlled.
AQ-SOP-4: Dust –control measures will be implemented in road construction and maintenance, as needed.
AQ-SOP-7: Major operations will be avoided on days when the local Air Quality Index is expected to exceed 150.

11. **Noise** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

There are no residences within the project location. Maintenance noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change.

12. **Human Health and Safety** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or safety. Contractor shall be required to follow the OSHA standards set forth in 29 CFR 1910.269 specifically paragraphs (a)(2), (b), (c), (g), (k), (p), and (r) as required under (a)(E)(2). Contractor shall also adhere to the requirements under Title 8 Cal OSHA Electrical Safety Order specifically Subchapter 5 Article 38 and Subchapter 7 Article 12. Contractor shall maintain a safe working distance from conductors as described in the above OSHA standards. If a safe working distance cannot be maintained, a clearance shall be requested 3 days in advance.

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: WAPA would work closely with the National Park Service to provide adequate notification of construction timing.

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

Signed: Latisha M. Saare Digitally signed by Latisha M. Saare Date: 2021.02.26 09:15:48 -08'00'

Date: 2/26/21