Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: COTP RAH and OSO Microwave Radio Antenna Installation

Project No.: 100153025

Project Manager: David Cooper

Location: Rancho Seco (RAH) and Mt. Oso (OSO)

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

B1.19 Microwave,meteorological, and radio towers

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. 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.

Category B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers: Siting, construction, modification, operation, and removal of microwave, radio communication, and meteorological towers and associated facilities, provided that the towers and associated facilities would not be in a governmentally designated scenic area (see B(4)(iv) of this appendix) unless otherwise authorized by the appropriate governmental entity.

WAPA proposes to perform all removal of the existing antennas, dehydrators & waveguides and installation of the new antennas, dehydrators & waveguides systems at the Rancho Seco Power Generating Facility and Mount Oso microwave sites.

The Rancho Seco (RAH) microwave site is located in Sacramento County within Sacramento Municipal Utility District Rancho Seco Nuclear Generating Station, on the side of one of the former cooling towers.

The Mt. Oso (OSO) microwave site is located on a COTP transmission tower in northwest Stanislaus County within remote mountains at elevation 3,338 feet.

Equipment will be connected to the 6 GHz commercial spectrum microwave radio at the site by terminating the waveguide inside of the shelter, connecting the pressure window on the waveguide for the dehydrator, installing the dehydrator, installing the waveguide to coax adapter and connecting the coax cable from the adapter to the radio.

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: 2021.02.05 13:56:26 -08'00' Date: 2/5/21

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.

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Project Site Description

The proposed project areas are in Stanislaus (OSO) and Sacramento (RAH) counties, California.

At OSO, Mount Oso is a prominent peak at 3,352 feet located in the northern Diablo Range and within the California interior chaparral and woodlands ecoregion. Winters are mild with moderate rainfall and summers are very dry and hot. The most common trees in the area are coast live oak (Quercus agrifolia) and blue oak (Quercus douglasii) with an understory dominated by annual grasses. The mountain region supports a diverse population of wildlife. The project site itself is a small improved industrial site, consisting of a tower, a building, and a surrounding gravel area without vegetation. An access road is present along the COTP. Equipment staging areas would be on the access road or within the improved area. No ground disturbance would take place.

At RAH, equipment staging would be on cement, within the industrial site for the former Rancho Seco Generating Station property at a designated location, and adjacent to the former cooling tower.

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:

Cultural resource surveys have been conducted and there are no cultural resources constraints at the sites. No historic resources are present. Natural Resources will be contacted immediately if archeological, paleontological, or historic evidence is found.

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: ☑ ☐

Work and staging of vehicles would take place within the improved area at Mt. Oso. The RAH site is an industrial facility.

No ground disturbance is anticipated.

Construction vehicles and equipment would be required to be clean before entering the project location to prevent spread of invasive weeds.

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

Explanation: ☐ ☑

At Mt. OSO, according to the CNDDB and USFWS, the range of California red-legged frog, San Joaquin kit fox, giant garter snake, and Valley elderberry longhorn beetle intersect the project area; however, no suitable habitat is present for these species at the gravel pad of the comm site itself. No ground disturbance is planned, and no impact on the species is anticipated.

RAH is located in an industrial complex and no special status species are present within the project work area.

It is possible that migratory birds could use the tower structures as nest sites.

Following issuance of the notice to proceed, and prior to the start of construction, WAPA will provide environmental awareness training to all contractor and subcontractor personnel and others involved in the construction activity.

For the protection of migratory birds, since work is anticipated to be scheduled during the nesting season (defined as March 1- August 15), WAPA will conduct nesting surveys at each work site, to check for established and utilized nests. If an established and utilized nest is identified then work will not be allowed to proceed at that site till the nestlings have fledged.

If a nest is detected, an appropriate buffer will be marked in which all O&M activities and herbicide applications will be prohibited from March 1 to August 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. 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: ☑ ☐

The project areas and adjacent areas do not have any water bodies, floodplains, or fish; therefore, no impacts would occur.

6. **Wetlands** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

The project areas do not have wetlands; therefore, no impacts would occur.

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 sites. The project is not within or near any specially designated areas, such as National Scenic Rivers.

9. **Visual Quality** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

The visual quality would be consistent with the curent use. There would be no significant change to the visual quality.

10. **Air Quality** ☐ ☑

Explanation:

No ground disturbance is planned.

A significant number of SN region lines and facilities are located in distressed air basins. These areas are in a nonattainment status with respect to the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) for certain criteria pollutants. The strategy adopted by the state of California to bring these air basins back into attainment with the federal standards incorporates some requirements that impact SN region's activities.

Avoidance Measure 1: Keep equipment in good operating condition to reduce exhaust emissions for all methods using machinery or vehicles (such as chainsaws, trucks, and graders);
Avoidance Measure 2: Keep equipment logs and set schedules for preventative maintenance;
Avoidance Measure 3: Periodically replace older equipment with equipment meeting more recent stringent California emission standards;
Avoidance Measure 4: Shut down rather than idle equipment not in active use;
Avoidance Measure 5: Avoid major operations on days when the local Air Quality Index is expected to exceed 150.

11. **Noise** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

There are no residences within the project locations. Construction noise would be minimal and temporary. No operational noise would occur.

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. The Contractor shall comply with the latest effective standards promulgated by Cal/OSHA and the Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Safety and Health Standards, 29 CFR 1910 and 29 CFR 1925, and shall comply with all applicable safety and health regulations and requirements, including all applicable consensus standards incorporated by reference. The Contractor shall take all reasonable precautions to protect the safety and health of employees and members of the public, and shall comply with all applicable safety and health regulations and requirements.

Contractor shall dispose of all waste material and equipment in accordance with WAPA Standard 13.Removed equipment or material that can be salvaged shall be recycled by the Contractor in accordance with WAPA Standard 13.

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 landowners 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: 2021.02.05 13:57:05 -08'00'

Date: 2/5/21