Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Trinity-Weaverville and Trinity-Carr Off-ROW Expedited Eight Hazard Tree Removals

Project No.: 100153025

Project Manager: Ricardo Velarde

Location: Trinity County, CA

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 the Trinity-Weaverville 60-kilovolt (kV) (TNI-WEA) and Trinity-Carr 230-kV (TNI-CAR) transmission lines located in Trinity County, 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.

WAPA proposes to remove a total of eight dead hazard trees located within three spans on the TNI-WEA line (12/5-12/6, 12/10-12/10A, and 2/1-2/2) and one span on the TNI-CAR line (1/2-1/3). The hazard trees are located outside but adjacent to the right-of-way (off-ROW) and have the potential to fall on or otherwise compromise the integrity of the transmission lines. WAPA Order 450.3A dictates the removal of hazard trees in compliance with the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) Standard FAC-003-1. WAPA has limited discretion on the removal of trees that meet hazard standards. All stumps will be cut no higher than 6-inches above ground with a chainsaw. Trees will be felled and left whole length on site. Limbs will be chipped and broadcast where chipper access is possible. For areas not accessible by a chipper, limbs will be lopped and scattered with debris not exceeding 12-inches in height. Trees include the following:

TNI-WEA 12/5-12/6: Douglas Fir 27”DBH 125’HT
TNI-WEA 12/5-12/6: Douglas Fir 26”DBH 76’HT
TNI-WEA 12/5-12/6: Douglas Fir 20”DBH 103’HT
TNI-WEA 12/10-12/10A: Douglas Fir 15”DBH 62’HT
TNI-WEA 2/1: Douglas Fir 19”DBH 67’HT
TNI-WEA 2/1: Douglas Fir 28”DBH 64’HT
TNI-CAR 1/2: Douglas Fir 33”DBH 96’HT
TNI-CAR 1/2: Douglas Fir 50”DBH 99’HT

Several downed trees have fallen across a one-mile stretch of access road leading to hazard tree removal sites. The downed trees will be cut by chainsaw and removed to enable vehicle and equipment access to tree removal sites.

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: 2021.06.08 11:26:48 -07'00' Date: 6/8/21

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 area is within the Trinity Mountain Range in Trinity County, California. Tree removal sites range in elevation between 2,700 and 3,000 feet and the vegetation type is predominantly mixed conifer. Land is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and private landowners. Equipment staging areas would be within the transmission line and access road ROWs 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:

Most of the area near or around the off-ROW trees have been surveyed with negative results. Manual removal of the trees as described in this document does not have the ability to impact cultural resources.

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: ☑ ☐

No special-status plants are known or expected in the project area. 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: ☐ ☑

Due to the imminent threat the eight hazard trees pose to the transmission lines, this work must occur within the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) breeding and nesting season (February 1 - July 31). WAPA consulted with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and received concurrence with the determination that project activities may affect, but are not likely adversely affect NSO and NSO Critical Habitat. To reduce impacts to NSO, WAPA has agreed to implement the following protective measures:
- Conduct nest surveys in advance of tree removal
- Reduce crew size to the minimum number needed to fell the trees safely
- Minimize the number of vehicles drive to the site
- After completing felling operations, return to address slash after NSO restrictions have lifted

A biological resource survey, including nesting bird survey, was completed the week prior to tree removal activities. No biological resources of concern were observed with the exception of one active mourning dove or Eurasian collared-dove nest located 36-feet from the two tree cluster at ¾ span along TNI-WEA 12/5-12/6. The Biologist determined it is unlikely tree removal activities will negatively impact the nest, particularly given the short duration of the work.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish** (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Explanation: ☑ ☐

The tree removal sites are not in proximity to water bodies or floodplains; therefore, no impacts would occur.

6. **Wetlands** ☑ ☐

Explanation:

The project area does 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 site. Nor is the project within, or near, any specially designated areas, such as National Scenic Rivers.

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:

A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during tree removal; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after construction.

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 procedures during the project.

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. Trucks transporting loose material will be covered or maintain at least two feet of freeboard and will not create any visible dust emissions.
AQ-SOP-5: There will be no open burning of construction trash.
AQ-SOP-6: Grading activities will cease during periods of high winds (as determined by local air quality management districts.
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. Tree removal construction 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), line-clearance tree trimming operations performed by line-clearance tree trimmers who are not qualified electrical workers. 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 landowners to provide adequate notification of tree removal 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: 2021.06.08 11:27:20 -07'00'

Date: 6/8/21