

Categorical Exclusion (CX) Determination

Proposed Action: Hazard tree and vegetation control/removal on Western Area Power Administration's (Western) Fort Randall-Sioux City 230 kV transmission line right-of-way (ROW) in the vicinity of the Five Ridge Prairie State Preserve in Iowa.

Description of Proposed Action: Western proposes to remove hazardous trees and other woody vegetation within 30 feet of the transmission line conductor, or that could fall within 30 feet of the conductor, on Western's existing Fort Randall-Sioux City 230 kV transmission line ROW between structures 107/4 and 109/5.

The equipment to be used for this clearing project includes a track mounted flail mower, a compact loader with log and brush grapple and tree shear, and support vehicles such as all terrain utility vehicles and pickup trucks. Trucks and trailers will be used to transport equipment to a staging area in the vicinity of the work site. Equipment will then be driven to the clearing areas on existing roads and trails in the vicinity of the transmission line. Off-road travel will be kept to a minimum. In the event of the need for off ROW access, precise routes will be coordinated and approved through the landowner or their agents.

The tracked flail mower will be the primary method used for clearing brush from the prescribed area. The flail mower will clear all brush and trees up to 12 inches in diameter and will leave an 8-foot wide path of fine mulch providing a barrier to soil erosion. Western will, as much as practicable, preserve the existing landscape and non-woody vegetation. Except where clearing is required or cross country access is necessary, all vegetation shall be avoided and preserved and will be protected from damage.

The herbicide Garlon 4 and Bark Oil Blue LP will be applied to the cut surfaces of the woody vegetation once cutting has been completed to prevent re-growth of vegetation. No grading of trails or earthmoving activities will occur. If significant soil damage occurs or areas are denuded during clearing operations, they will be re-graded (if necessary) and seeded with a seed mix recommended by the Plymouth County Conservation Board.

Numbers and Titles of Categorical Exclusions Being Applied: 10 CFR 1021.410 Subpart D, Appendix B, B1.3, Routine maintenance activities and custodial services for buildings, structures, rights-of-way, infrastructures, vehicles and equipment, and localized vegetation and pest control during which operations may be suspended and resumed.

Regulatory Requirements for CX Determination: The DOE Guidelines for Compliance with the Regulatory Requirements for the National Environmental Policy Act at 10 CFR 1021.410(b), require the following determinations be made in order for a proposed action to be categorically excluded from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review:

- (1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix B to Subpart D;
- (2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal; and
- (3) 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.

Results of Review: In accordance with DOE environmental regulations (10 CFR 1021) Western has reviewed the proposed action in terms of the level of NEPA review needed. Based on this review, Western has determined the proposal is encompassed within a class of action listed in Appendix B to Subpart D (10 CFR 1021.410) which lists actions not normally requiring the preparation of either an Environmental Impact Statement or an Environmental Assessment, provided the actions meet the integral elements defined in Appendix B.

The proposed action fits into the categorical exclusions listed under B1.3, Routine maintenance activities and custodial services for buildings, structures, rights-of-way, infrastructures, vehicles and equipment, and localized vegetation and pest control during which operations may be suspended and resumed.

Endangered Species

Western made a determination of “no effect” under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for the two threatened and endangered species listed for the county on January 28, 2010. This determination was sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service who concurred with our finding by letter on March 11, 2010. In addition, Western consulted with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources who agreed with the plan by letter dated October 20, 2010, recommending continued close coordination with the Plymouth County Conservation Board for off ROW access.

Historical

Records indicate two archaeological sites have been reported within or very near the project location. Fourteen other sites were recorded within 1 mile of the project location. A class 3 survey was conducted by Western during the week of November 30, 2009. Based upon these surveys, and considering the limited nature of the proposed action, Western made a “no adverse effect” determination. A report detailing the findings and Western’s determination was sent to the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on February 5, 2010. On February 20, 2010, the SHPO concurred with Western’s determination of no historic properties affected.

Determination: Based on my review of information provided to me concerning the proposed action as NEPA Compliance Officer, I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is categorically excluded from further requirements of NEPA review.

Nicholas J. Stas

Nicholas J. Stas
NEPA Compliance Officer
Upper Great Plains

March 29, 2010

Date