

CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION



Proposed Action Title: Ault-Craig 345-kV and North Park-Hayden 230-kV Transmission Lines Access Road Maintenance and Vegetation Management (Machine Work)

Location: Routt County, Colorado

Project Number: 2022-010

Expiration Date: December 31, 2028

A. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Rocky Mountain Region (RMR), proposes to conduct routine access road maintenance and vegetation management between Structures 136/3 and 141/5 on the Ault-Craig (AU-CRG) 345-kV Transmission Line, and between Structures 135/4 and 141/3 on the parallel North Park-Hayden (NOP-HDN) 230-kV Transmission Line, in Routt County, Colorado.

The intent of WAPA's vegetation management program is to secure and maintain a manageable and stable ROW that minimizes vegetative threats to transmission system safety, security, and reliability, and ultimately does not require frequent re-treatments. Achieving a desired condition is a process that may require several treatments over an extended period of time. Once a desired condition is achieved, the desired condition will be proactively maintained. WAPA's desired condition, as stated in *WAPA Order 450.3C*, is consistent with American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 Part 7 and the minimum vegetation clearance distances (MVCD) as defined by North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC) standard FAC-003-4. The intent of the proposed vegetation management is to continue to move the ROW closer to, or actively maintain, WAPA's desired condition. The proposed vegetation management will consist of enlisting trained vegetation management crews to assess the ROW condition, identify incompatible vegetation, and trim and remove incompatible vegetation, including danger trees as defined in *WAPA Order 430.1C*, using the appropriate means for the terrain and vegetation type. Appropriate means of vegetation removal may include equipment such as masticators, hydro-axes, bucket trucks, skid-steer loaders with brush-hog attachments, mulchers, chippers, chainsaws, pickup trucks, ATVs, measuring equipment, and associated forestry tools.

To safely access all areas requiring vegetation management between AU-CRG Structures 136/3 to 139/2 and NOP-HDN Structures 135/4 to 138/3, routine maintenance of existing access roads, crossings, landings, and other ROW features will be completed as necessary within approved work areas. Examples of routine maintenance activities that may be completed include: blading; grading; removal of rocks, vegetation, and other obstacles impeding safe travel; installation, repair, and replacement of water bars, rip-rap, and other erosion control measures; installation of new culverts; cleanout, repair, and in-kind replacement of existing culverts and other drainage features; washout repair; landing maintenance; installation and maintenance of gates; and soil stabilization. Equipment used for this project may include motor graders, bulldozers, excavators, dump trucks, compactors, skid-steers, and work trucks.

Work will occur on private lands, public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and trust lands managed by the State of Colorado. Some of the access road maintenance will extend outside of WAPA's existing access road and transmission line ROWs with landowner consent to

ensure roadways can be safely used by a variety of logging equipment. However, no new roads will be constructed, and work will be primarily focused on previously disturbed locations.

B. STIPULATIONS PERTAINING TO PROPOSAL:

- 1) If the scope of work of this project changes, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted to determine whether additional environmental review is required.
- 2) **This Categorical Exclusion expires on December 31, 2028.** If all project work has not been completed by the expiration date, or if the need for an environmental compliance extension is anticipated, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted for an updated environmental review.
- 3) **The Environmental Restrictions Area maps provided to WAPA's maintenance crews show the access roads and ROW areas approved for maintenance.** The approved works areas include indicated access roads with variable widths (please refer to the provided maps for specific access road widths); indicated AU-CRG ROW areas to a width of 175 feet (87.5 feet either side of center conductor); and indicated NOP-HDN ROW areas to a width of 125 feet (62.5 feet either side of center conductor). If clarification of maps is required, please contact RMR's Archaeologist at (970) 658-6794 or RMR's Natural Resource Specialist at (970) 593-8803.
- 4) **The Environmental Restrictions Area maps provided to WAPA's maintenance crews include biological resource boundaries.** The BLM has requested that WAPA avoid work within these boundaries between December 1 and June 30 to prevent disturbance to wintering and calving elk on BLM lands.
- 5) Installation of new culverts and crossings is authorized under U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) 2021 Nationwide Permit (NWP) Number 57, Electric Utility Line and Telecommunications Activities. A copy of this permit and associated conditions has been provided to WAPA's maintenance crews. If any new culverts or crossings will require disturbance of greater than 0.10-acre, RMR's Environment Department must be contacted to determine whether additional environmental review is required.
- 6) Only cutting or removing of vegetation above the ground (e.g. with a chainsaw, rotary cutter, or mower) is allowed within Waters of the United States (within wetland boundaries and below the ordinary high-water mark of surface waters). Within these areas, all stumps and roots must be left in place to minimize soil disturbance. No mechanized pushing, dragging, or other activities that would add or remove soil or create significant debris piles (e.g. brush or slash piling) is authorized within these areas.
- 7) Vegetation management crews must carefully inspect vegetation for active avian nests prior to any vegetation management activities between May 15 and August 15. 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 it 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.

- 8) 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.
- 9) 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, (970) 286-3523, or (970) 658-6794. Work in the area of discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 10) 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, (970) 286-3523, or (970) 658-6794 (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 notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 11) If culturally modified trees are encountered during implementation of the proposed action, an RMR Archaeologist must be contacted at (970) 302-4753 or (970) 286-3523. No removal or trimming of these trees is authorized until written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 12) Vehicles and equipment (trailers, trucks, UTVs, etc.) will not be moved between work areas without first taking reasonable measures to ensure they are free of soil, seeds, vegetation matter, or other debris that could contain noxious weed seeds.
- 13) 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

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.

Signature and Date

James Wood, Regional Environmental Manager
Rocky Mountain Region
Western Area Power Administration

Prepared by:
Abraham Thompson, Archaeologist/Natural Resource Specialist

