



Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration

U.S. Department of Energy



<u>Proposed Action Title:</u>	Willoby-Prospect Valley Tap 115-kV Conductor Upgrade, Sand Creek Switching Station Upgrades, and Point of Interconnection
<u>WAPA Region:</u>	Rocky Mountain
<u>Location (County/State):</u>	Weld County, Colorado
<u>CX Determination Number:</u>	2026-RMR-009 (RMR Project Number: 2023-058)
<u>CX Determination Expiration Date*:</u>	June 12, 2031

**CX is valid until the date above (no longer than five years from when document was signed) or completion of work started prior to the expiration of the CX Determination, unless there are substantial changes to the scope of work, location, or applicable regulations. If such changes occur prior to the expiration of the CX, the Region Environmental Program will review the analysis to ensure the CX is still applicable.*

Proposed Action Description:

Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) proposes to construct a new Point of Interconnection (POI) at their existing Sand Creek Switching Station to accommodate the interconnection request submitted by Janus Solar, LLC (Janus). This will require upgrading 15.4 miles of conductor on WAPA's existing Willoby-Prospect Valley Tap 115-kV Transmission Line (a segment of WAPA's 22.3 mile Willoby-Sand Creek Tap Transmission line) and upgrading the existing Sand Creek Switching Station by adding a fourth 115-kV terminal bay and a 3-breaker ring bus within WAPA's currently owned property, located in Weld County, approximately 13 miles Northeast of the Denver International Airport. The POI will be constructed in accordance with the Generator Interconnection Agreement. Execution of the interconnection agreement is an activity foreseeably necessary for the proposal (10 CFR 1021.102(d)). WAPA will retain ownership and management of Sand Creek Switching Station.

The Sand Creek Switching Station can accommodate adding a fourth 115-kV terminal bay without expanding the current boundaries of the switching station. WAPA will install new foundations, power circuit breakers, disconnect switches, capacitor coupled voltage transformers (CCVT), rigid bus, switchboard panel, and control and metering equipment within the existing fenced perimeters of the switching station. Any temporary equipment or structures needed to facilitate the interconnection will be installed within WAPA's existing property boundaries and removed prior to completion of the project. Equipment used for construction may include bucket trucks, truck-mounted augers and cranes, skid-steer loaders, utility trucks, digger derrick, aerial lift, pole trailers, and equipment trailers. Mobile equipment will be stored on the existing substation pad when not in use. Hazardous materials will not be stored during construction or operations.

The existing Willoby-Prospect Valley Tap Transmission Line will be reconductored to 131 MVA. It is expected that construction activity for the line upgrade will be conducted in seven discrete sections (typically every 2.0–3.0 miles) within WAPA's 15.4-mile ROW. Conductors will be unclipped manually,



via bucket truck, from each pole structure and travelers (pully-like devices) will be installed to allow pulling of the new conductor. Each discrete section will have a pulling site with a trailer to pull the new conductor. Each phase of the conductor will be attached to the trailer, with the new conductor at the start of each pulling run so as the old conductor is removed, the new conductor is pulled into its place.

After the new conductor is pulled into place, each pole structure will be revisited, travelers will be removed, and the new conductor will be clipped into place. Alternatively, a helicopter or drone may be used as the preferred best approach to attach travelers, insulators, and unclip and clip the conductor, which will decrease ground impacts and time needed to complete the upgrades.

No grading or vegetative clearing will be required to complete the conductor upgrades. Equipment used for this project may include helicopters, drones, bucket trucks, wire pullers and tensioners, cranes, splicing trailers, cable reel trailers, and utility trucks. It is expected that construction activity along the Line Upgrade will take up to three weeks, and WAPA rights-of-way (ROW) will be used for material storage. All work will be confined to WAPA's existing transmission line and access road ROW. No additional ROW width is needed to accommodate the new conductor size.

The Sand Creek Switching Station upgrade, Willoby-Prospect Valley Tap conductor upgrades, and interconnection is anticipated to begin as early as spring 2028. The duration of construction is dependent upon contractor and supply availability, outage restrictions, and weather. All construction activities will be conducted in accordance with WAPA's Construction Standards.

Environmental Requirements during Project Implementation:

- 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 June 12, 2031.** 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) **Surveys for nesting burrowing owls will be conducted prior to starting the line reconductor project if construction takes place during the nesting period from March 15 – August 31.** If nesting burrowing owls are identified, coordination with the state of Colorado will take place and buffers may be established.
- 4) The Environmental Requirements Area maps provided to WAPA's maintenance crews and/or Contractor(s) include cultural resource boundaries. No ground disturbance is allowed within these areas. All access within these cultural resource boundaries must be limited to existing access roads. If ground disturbance within these areas is necessary, an RMR Archeologist must be contacted at (970) 302-4753, (970) 286-3523, or (970) 218-4946. No ground disturbance within these cultural resource boundaries is authorized until written notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.



- 5) Transmission line and substation components must be designed and constructed in conformance with the most current editions of *Suggested Practices for Avian Protection on Power Lines* and *Reducing Avian Collisions with Power Lines*, both published by the Avian Power Line Interaction Committee (APLIC), to minimize avian collision and electrocution risk while maintaining safe and reliable electrical service.
- 6) Any injured or orphaned birds and all observed active nests must be immediately reported to RMR Environment at (970) 342-6462 or (970) 473-5586. 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.
- 7) 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) 218-4946. Work in the area of discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by an RMR Archaeologist.
- 8) 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) 218-4946 (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.
- 9) 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.
- 10) Installation of equipment in substations must conform to WAPA's requirements and must be approved by WAPA. Oil-filled equipment, including bushings, must not contain polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB). In addition, oil-filled equipment must be permanently labeled by the manufacturer as No-PCB. Certification must be provided to RMR's Environment Department at or before the time of installation. Oil-filled equipment may require an oil spill containment system to comply with federal or state regulations.
- 11) Activities involving the use of fuel, oil, hydraulic fluid, or other petroleum products must comply with RMR's Spill Response Plan (SRP).

Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied (Number and Title):

B1.3 Routine maintenance

B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities

B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way



B4.11 Electric power substations and interconnection facilities

B4.13 Upgrading and rebuilding existing powerlines

Findings:

For the DOE procedures regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see 10 CFR 1021.102 and Appendix B to [10 CFR Part 1021](#), and also Section 5.4 (Applying one or more categorical exclusions to a proposal) and Appendices B and C of [DOE's National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures](#) (Jun. 30, 2025).

Requirements and guidance in 10 CFR 1021.102 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures: (See full text in regulation and in Implementing Procedures)

- ☒ The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021 or Appendix B or C of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures (June 30, 2025).
To fit within the classes of actions listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021, or Appendix B of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures, a proposal must satisfy the conditions that are integral elements of the classes of actions in Appendix B of both 10 CFR Part 1021 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures. Additionally, for CXs adopted pursuant to NEPA Section 109 (see DNIP, Appendix C), the originating Federal agency's integral elements or extraordinary circumstances must be in accordance with the applicable requirements.
- ☒ There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. DOE or an applicant may modify the proposal to avoid reasonably foreseeable adverse significant effects such that the categorical exclusion would apply.
- ☒ The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

[Note: For proposals that fit within the categorical exclusions listed in Appendix C of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures, see DOE's notice of adoption for the subject Appendix C categorical exclusion for additional considerations. DOE notices of adoption for other agency categorical exclusions may be found on [DOE's Section 109 webpage](#).]



Determination:

Based on my review of the proposed action, I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other requirements and guidance set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

WAPA Authorized Official Signature:

Barton V. Barnhart
Senior Vice President and
Rocky Mountain Regional Manager