

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Canby Tap to Malin - Hilltop No. 1, Redmond District, Access Road Maintenance

Project No.: 332210

Project Manager: Randall Browning, Access Road Engineer – TFLF-TPP-3

Location: Modoc County, CA

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA proposes to perform routine road maintenance, repair, and improvements on Canby Tap to Malin - Hilltop No. 1 Access Road Maintenance Project. The proposed work is necessary to maintain or repair existing infrastructure and roadway safety. The proposed project includes the following features:

- Existing access road improvements, including construction of water bars, drain dips, and placement of spot rock (0.3 miles)
- Access road reconstruction (1.2 miles)
- Roadside clearing (1.8 miles)
- New and/or replaced culverts including cross drains (7 total)
- Total lineal distance of proposed work (8.9 lineal miles)

The project would include general maintenance and repairs of the existing gravel and dirt roadway including: reshaping, grading, compacting existing road surface, placing crushed rock on the roadway surface, roadside clearing of overgrown vegetation on the roadbed, and installation and repair of water bars and drain dips. In addition, 7 new and or replacement culverts would be installed along cross drains and within newly constructed drainage ditches. The described road maintenance activities are proposed to occur during the 2018-2019 construction season.

If prior to or during construction activities the proposed action may result in adverse impacts to resources that are not described within this categorical exclusion, coordination with the appropriate agencies and a reevaluation of effects may be warranted.

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, July 9, 1996; 61 FR 64608, Dec. 6, 1996, 76 FR 63764, Nov. 14, 2011), BPA 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, BPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

/s/ John Wiley

John Wiley

Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: June 28, 2018

Attachment(s): 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.

Proposed Action: Canby Tap to Malin - Hilltop No. 1, Redmond District, Access Road Maintenance Project

Project Site Description

A site evaluation was conducted by an Otak, Inc. biologist between August 10-11, 2016, to evaluate site conditions and the surrounding environment. The proposed project is located in rural Modoc County, CA. Land use within the project vicinity includes the BPA right-of-way clearing, rocky vegetated hillslopes, forested areas, and open space. Land ownership in the vicinity includes the BPA right of way, U.S. Forest Service Modoc National Forest lands, and privately held property. The project is located in high desert habitat characterized by open spaces and forested hillslopes with vegetation composition typical of the region, dominated by Western juniper (*Juniperus* spp), Ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), native bunchgrass, as well as native and non-native forbs. The approximate site elevation range is approximately 4,320-5,180 feet above sea level.

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	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> A pedestrian archaeological survey of these roads was conducted on the Canby Tap project area on October 18, 2017, by Heritage Research Associates, Inc. to locate any surface evidence of prehistoric or historical archaeological materials. No surface evidence of prehistoric or demonstrably historical cultural materials was found on the surveyed access road segments. Nearby, previously recorded archaeological sites were reviewed and determined to be outside of the current project area. No historic properties would be affected by this project and no additional investigations are recommended for these access road segments. In the event that archaeological or historical materials are discovered during project activities, work in the immediate vicinity would stop, the area would be secured, and the SHPO and the environmental project lead would be notified. Work would not commence until the SHPO has cleared the area (Pers. comm. Brian O'Donnchadha, May 29, 2018). The CA State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) responded to the initial cultural resources report with clarifying questions and comments. BPA provided OHP with a response on May 16, 2018; received final concurrence from OHP on June 12, 2018 (OHP Ref. #DOE_2016_0926_001).		
2. Geology and Soils	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Explanation:</u> The project includes roadway reconstruction on areas of existing roadway that are degraded, as well as roadway improvements (water bars and drain dips) to improve drainage. The proposed roadway improvements would likely conserve soil resources by reducing ponding and soil erosion within the roadway. The water bars or drain dips would not alter existing aquatic resources. No prime or unique		

farmlands would be affected. Therefore, the proposed action would have limited impacts to geology and soils.

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)



Explanation:

Sparse vegetation established within the roadway in some areas and would be cleared from the road prism where roadwork is proposed. No trees would be removed as a result of the project. Three federally-listed or proposed listed plant species under jurisdiction of the USFWS are documented to occur or have the potential to occur in the region [white bark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*); Greene's tuctoria (*Tuctoria greenei*); slender orcutt grass (*Orcuttia tenuis*)]; however, no suitable habitat for these species were found to occur within the project area. No special-status plant species or their habitats were documented to occur within the vicinity or were observed during the field survey due to lack of suitable habitat. A Letter of No Effect has been completed to document compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has been submitted under separate cover to BPA. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on special-status plant species or their designated critical habitats and limited impacts to other native and non-native vegetation.

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



Explanation:

An official federally-listed species list was requested from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Information, Planning and Conservation database (IPaC) on April 12, 2018 (updated). Three federally-listed or proposed listed wildlife species under jurisdiction of the USFWS are documented to occur or have the potential to occur in the region [gray wolf (*Canis lupis*); North American wolverine (*Gulo gulo luscus*); yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*)]; however, no suitable habitat for special-status wildlife species was found to occur within the project area. The proposed project actions would mainly occur within the existing road prism and any impacts to non-listed wildlife species would be temporary in nature and limited to construction within the road prism. See the ESA Letter of No Effect for this project for further details. Therefore, the project would have no impacts to federally-listed wildlife and limited impacts to other wildlife species.

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



Explanation:

The existing access road crosses several mapped unnamed perennial and intermittent waterways within the upper Pitt River watershed near or within Howard's Gulch. Most of the waterways are seasonal drainages that carry water only during rain events; however, two watercourses likely have perennial flow and include the following: 1) the drainage/outlet of Duncan Reservoir, and 2) a newly constructed artificial drainage ditch that seems to drain groundwater and originates at a fish hatchery currently under construction. No work is proposed below Ordinary High Water (OHW) at the Duncan Reservoir drainage crossing. Three new culvert crossings are proposed for installation across the artificial drainage ditches that were dug across the BPA ROW to restore access to the BPA towers and infrastructure. This ditch connects to the unnamed seasonal waterway that is the main drainage of Howard's Gulch. This waterway eventually connects to the Pitt River approximately 4 miles

downstream.

No Federal or CA State listed or proposed listed fish species under jurisdiction of the USFWS or NMFS are documented to occur or have the potential to occur in the project area. A Letter of No Effect has been completed to document compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and has been submitted under separate cover to BPA. The work as proposed is exempt from Corps Section 404 and CA State Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement permit applications (per Robert Chase, U.S. Army Corps and Guy Chetelat, CA Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, email communications dated May 2018). Therefore, the project would not be subject to Federal or CA State permitting approval, and no in-water work window would apply (personal communications with Kate Blanchard, CDFW, June 13, 2018).

The project will have no effect to floodplains, special-status aquatic species, or their designated critical habitats. Any impacts to water quality from the installation of the three culverts within the drainage ditch would be expected to be localized and temporary in duration.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation:

The work as proposed is exempt from Corps Section 404 and CA State Lake and Streambed Alteration Agreement permit applications (per Robert Chase, U.S. Army Corps and Guy Chetelat, CA Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board, email communications dated May 2018). No jurisdictional wetlands are present in the project area or within at least 100 feet to either side of the existing road. No wetlands would be impacted by the proposed project.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation:

Groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted by the proposed project as the project does not include any groundwater withdraws or aquifer recharge areas. There would be no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation:

No change in land use is proposed as part of the project. The BPA right of way crosses portions of the Modoc National Forest; however, no new ground-disturbing activities are proposed within lands owned by the USFS. Therefore, the project would not result in changes or impacts to land use or specially designated areas.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation:

There are no residences within visual range of the work limits. The proposed project feature is consistent with existing roads. There would be no impacts to visual resources.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation:

The proposed project is expected to reduce dust generation and improve air quality along the access road by covering exposed soils with a gravel surface layer. Minor vehicle emissions during construction would be temporary in duration.

11. **Noise**



Explanation:

Temporary construction noise during daylight hours is expected. Construction is expected to last less than 8 weeks. The current level of road use is not expected to change and no operational noise increases are expected.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation:

The project would develop a site-specific health and safety plan to address any hazards during the proposed work. The proposed work is necessary to ensure ongoing safe and reliable operation of the transmission line and to maintain power delivery in the region. Project activities would not impact human health or safety.

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

The Access Road Engineer would contact adjacent and potentially affected landowners prior to project construction.

Based on the foregoing, this proposed project does not have the potential to cause significant impacts to any environmentally sensitive resource.

Signed: /s/ John Wiley
John Wiley EP-4
Physical Scientist (Environmental)

Date: June 28, 2018