

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Removal of Weather Monitoring Equipment at BPA's Mount Hebo Communications Site

Project Manager: Scott Winner, PGS-5

Location: Yamhill County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to remove the following weather monitoring equipment from BPA's Mount Hebo communications site: anemometer, temperature and humidity probes, cables, gradient shields, mounting brackets and hardware, data logger panels, and other weather-related monitoring equipment. The outdoor equipment and appurtenances to be removed are mounted on the existing steel-lattice communications structure, are attached to the sides and roof of the communications building, and are located under a waveguide ice shield that spans overhead between the building and the tower. Some electronic equipment to be removed is also located inside of the communications building. No ground-disturbing activities or building modifications are proposed. Removal of the equipment would take 1-2 days to complete.

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), 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/ Becky Hill

Becky Hill

Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Carol Leiter

Carol Leiter
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel June 3, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

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: Removal of Weather Monitoring Equipment at BPA's Mount Hebo Communications Site

Project Site Description

The project site is located at the BPA Mount Hebo communications site in Township 4S Range 9W Section 22 in Yamhill County, Oregon. The communications site is located about 10 miles east of the Pacific Ocean, 35 miles northwest of Salem, and is situated on Mount Hebo's western ridgeline. The BPA site is one of five communications sites located within a 2-acre communications site complex. The complex is located on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Siuslaw National Forest. Mixed conifer forest habitat surrounds the complex on three sides, while a 10-acre meadow is located on the western side of the complex. There is evidence of timber harvest activity in the region, including on Mount Hebo. Between HWY 22 and Mount Hebo's summit, rural residences, pastures, livestock, and a USFS campground are found along Mount Hebo Road.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground-disturbing activities and no building modifications are proposed with this project. BPA's archaeologist made a no potential to affect determination on May 21, 2021, and BPA's historian issued a no potential to cause effects on historic properties memorandum on May 25, 2021.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require ground-disturbing activities; therefore, there would be no impacts to geology or soils.

3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact special-status plant species or habitats. The Nelson's checker-mallow (*Sidalcea nelsoniana*) is a federally-threatened species that has the potential to occur in Yamhill County. Vegetation surveys of the communications site and surrounding areas were conducted in 2018, 2019, and 2020. No special-status plant species, including Nelson's checker-mallow, were present at the project site. BPA made a No Effect Determination for the Nelson's checker-mallow on May 28, 2021.

BPA's vegetation maintenance program allows for herbicide application at its communications sites to prevent vegetation from establishing within the fenced-in gravel

yard. Vegetation management has not occurred at the site in some time, so some species have started to establish within the graveled communications yard, including: native and non-native grasses, common pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*), lupine (*Lupinus sp.*), St. John's wort (*Hypericum perforatum*), hairy cat's-ear (*Hypochaeris radicata*), ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*), strawberry (*Fragaria sp.*), and goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*). However, as stated, no impacts to any vegetation are expected as part of this project.

Notes:

- Vegetation surveys detected several Coast Range fawn lilies (*Erythronium elegans*; a federal Species of Concern and a state-threatened species), 5-30 feet north of the communications site's northern-most chain link fence. No Coast Range fawn lilies occur within the communications site's fenced in area where project activities would occur. The area where they are located has been labeled as an environmentally sensitive area on project maps and would be avoided by work crew at all times. Therefore, there would be no impacts to the Coast Range fawn lily.
- Vegetation surveys detected about 30 early blue violets (*Viola adunca*) in the 1,700 sq. ft. graveled parking area associated with the BPA communications site. While this plant does not currently have a state or Federal special-status designation, it is the primary host plant for the Oregon silverspot butterfly, which is federally threatened. Because there could be Oregon silverspot butterfly larvae on or immediately around the early blue violets year-round, the entire graveled parking area has been labeled as an environmentally sensitive area on project maps and would be avoided by vehicles and heavy equipment at all times. Therefore, there would be no impacts to early blue violets or larvae.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact special-status wildlife species or habitats. The marbled murrelet (*Brachyramphus marmoratus*) and the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) are federally-threatened species that have the potential to occur on Mount Hebo. Field-verified desktop analyses determined that there is no suitable marbled murrelet or northern spotted owl nesting habitat within 111 yards of the project site, and project activities would not generate noise levels that would temporarily disturb those species should they be nesting greater than 111 yards away. Additionally, the nearest northern spotted owl detection was reported over 35 years ago and greater than 5 miles away, despite demographic surveys continuing in this area annually. Because of these data, BPA determined the proposed project would have no effect on the federally-listed northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet.

The project site is located in designated critical habitat for the marbled murrelet and the northern spotted owl. Because no habitat would be altered as a result of this project, BPA made a no adverse modification determination for marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl designated critical habitat.

Additionally, the Oregon silverspot butterfly (*Speyeria zerene hippolyta*) is a federally-threatened species that is known to occur at the meadow habitats at Mount Hebo, including the meadow located immediately adjacent to the BPA communications site. Because project activities would not disturb vegetation (especially Oregon silverspot butterfly host plants and nectar plant species), and the following avoidance measures would be adhered to, BPA made a no effect determination for the Oregon silverspot butterfly:

Notes:

- Project activities would occur outside of the Oregon silverspot butterfly's flight period (July 15 to Sept. 30) to avoid vehicle collisions with in-flight adults.

- Areas that contain Oregon silverspot butterfly host plants have been labeled as environmentally sensitive areas on project maps and would be avoided by vehicles and heavy equipment at all times.
- In the graveled parking area, only light foot traffic, near the chain link fence, is allowed so workers can enter the communications site through the chain link fence's gate.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require ground-disturbing activities that could produce sediment, and there are no waterbodies, floodplains, or fish habitat within 500 feet of the project area. Therefore, there would be no impacts to water bodies, floodplains or fish, or fish habitat.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require ground-disturbing activities and no wetlands occur within 2,000 feet of the project area. Therefore, there would be no impacts to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not require ground-disturbing activities that could provide a pathway for groundwater contamination. Spill prevention measures would be utilized during project activities; therefore, there would be no impacts to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not change the current land use at this site. The project site is located within the USFS's Scenic-Biological Special Interest Area (SIA). Mount Hebo's western ridgeline used to be a US Air Force Radar Defense site. Recreationalists hike Mount Hebo's trail system and visit an informational plaque near the north end of the communications complex. The weather monitoring equipment removal from the existing BPA communications site would not impact the SIA, or the current land use at Mount Hebo as a communications site complex or recreation destination.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact the visual quality of the area. The weather monitoring equipment is relatively small compared to the BPA communications site as a whole. Equipment removal from the site would largely go unnoticed because the communications site would look the same as it did before the removal. Therefore, there would be no impacts to visual quality.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would have a small impact on air quality because project activities would generate a small amount of vehicle emissions during the 1-2 days of work at the site.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would have minor impacts on noise quality at this remote communications site during daylight hours. The nearest residence is located over 5 miles away and would not hear the project activities. Furthermore, the operational noise of the communications site would not change as a result of this project.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project would not impact human health or safety because all standard safety protocols would be followed during project activities, and would occur in fenced areas.

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: N/A

Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation: N/A

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: N/A

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: N/A

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: All project activities would occur within the fenced area of the BPA communications site at Mount Hebo. No notifications to landowners or recreationalists are necessary because the proposed actions would be located within the communications site's fence and would not impact them. USFS coordination is not necessary for this project because the proposed maintenance activities are allowed under an existing communications site permit from the USFS.

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

Signed: /s/ Becky Hill June 3, 2021
Becky Hill, ECT-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC