

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Blue Ridge, Noti, Lane, and Kenyon Communication Site Upgrades

Project No.: P01237

Project Manager: Rian Dustan, TTBP-DITT-2; Ben Younce, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Lane and Coos counties, 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) is proposing to replace its aging VHF radio system at its facilities with a simple, modern, VHF two-way radio system in its Eugene VHF radio region. Field personnel use this system for communication with each other and with data control centers. The replacement would help improve voice coverage and help BPA meet its goals of safe facilities maintenance and operations, and uninterrupted power transmission. These proposed upgrades are being coordinated with similar efforts at many radio stations across BPA's service area under the "Mobile-REDI" project.

BPA proposes the following activities at several sites:

Blue Ridge: Install a VHF whip antenna towards the top of the station's existing 30-foot-tall communication tower. The new antenna would be used to test and verify functioning of the new VHF radio system for the Eugene MREDI Region. New coaxial cable would also be installed on the tower to connect the new antennas to indoor equipment. The cable would run from the antenna, down the tower through the waveguide, through an existing wall port, and be grounded to the existing ground bar near the waveguide entrance. The associated VHF radio repeater would be installed in a new component rack with new ground bar inside the communication building. No heavy equipment would be used and the tower would be climbed by personnel without the aid of a crane or lift. Work would occur over two days in August 2022.

Noti and Kenyon Mountain: Install a VHF whip antenna towards the top of each station's existing 55-foot-tall communication tower. The existing antenna at Noti would temporarily be lowered to 45 feet prior to final removal to make way for the new antenna. The new antennas at Noti and Kenyon would be used to test and verify functioning of the new VHF radio system for the Eugene MREDI Region. New coaxial cable would also be installed on the towers to connect the new antennas to indoor equipment. The cable would run from the antenna, down the tower through the waveguide, through an existing wall port, and be grounded to the existing ground bar near the waveguide entrance. Associated VHF radio repeaters would be installed in new component racks with new ground bars inside each communication building. No heavy equipment would be used and the towers would be climbed by personnel without the aid of a crane or lift. Work would occur over two days in August 2022.

Lane: Install a new 9' rack in the communication room of the substation control house. Install a new ground bar and fuse panel in the rack. Install a new DC breaker and run new wire from the fuse panel to the DC breaker. Wire the fuse panel to the existing alarm system in rack 4.

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/ Nancy A. Wittpenn

Nancy A. Wittpenn
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>July 11, 2022</u>
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: Blue Ridge, Noti, Lane, and Kenyon Communication Site Upgrades

Project Site Description

The work would take place at existing BPA facilities that include buildings, towers, and supporting structures. Work would occur in previously disturbed graveled or paved areas of facility yards and in the communication buildings. The Blue Ridge and Kenyon Mountain radio sites operate as easements on private land surrounded by Bureau of Land Management-managed forested landscapes in various stages of regrowth. The Noti radio site also operates as an easement on Bureau of Land Management land which is also surrounded by forested landscapes in various stages of regrowth. Lane Substation is just west of the city of Eugene. The three radio communication sites are located in the coastal range of Coos and Lane counties, Oregon. Lane Substation is close to Eugene and the I-5 Corridor.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On May 2, 2022, and June 15, 2022, a BPA Historian and Archaeologist reviewed the undertaking and determined the proposed activities would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties. No ground disturbance would occur as a result of this undertaking, and minor additive features and modifications from the project would not impact the integrity of historic microwave radio stations.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or other ground-disturbing activities would occur in the radio site yards. There would be some floor drilling for the ground rod inside the communication room at Lane Substation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur within existing facilities or yards where no plants occur.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: In addition to common types of wildlife found in the coastal range in Lane and Coos counties, four state and/or federally protected species have been documented within one mile of the sites. These include the Northern Spotted Owl, Marbled Murrelet, the Northern Red-legged Frog, and the Pacific Marten. Work would be limited to the existing sites and most of that work would be indoors. While noise generated directly at the sites and/or from vehicular traffic to and from the sites could cause potential disturbance to common and/or protected wildlife species in the vicinity, the disturbance would be minimal and temporary.

To address potential effects to Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl—both listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act—BPA completed informal Section 7 consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who concurred on July 8, 2022, that the proposed action may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect, both species at the radio sites. Because BPA would not remove trees or vegetation, there would be no effect to designated Critical Habitat. To avoid and minimize potential effects, BPA would schedule work during the timeframes specified for those sites below.

Notes:

- At Noti, Blue Ridge, and Kenyon Mountain radio sites, the following avoidance and minimization measures apply:

The Northern Spotted Owl is sensitive to noise during the critical breeding period (March 1 to July 15) when a flush response may cause nest abandonment. To eliminate the potential for disturbance to nesting owls during the critical nesting period, BPA would schedule work after July 15 and before March 1.

The Marbled Murrelet critical nesting period is April 1 to August 5. The late nesting season runs until September 15. To avoid and minimize disturbance and disruption during these periods, BPA would schedule no more than three days of construction during the critical nesting and breeding period (April 1 to August 5). In addition, for all work performed between April 1 and September 15, BPA would implement daily timing restrictions to ensure that work occurs no earlier than two hours after dawn and no later than two hours before dusk.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water features occur within or in close proximity to the radio sites. Lane Substation work would be indoors.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands occur within or in close proximity to the radio sites. Lane Substation work would be indoors.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or ground disturbance would occur.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All proposed work is consistent with existing land uses at these sites and there are no specially-designated areas in the vicinity.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: At a three-inch diameter, the 20-foot-tall whip antennas and associated equipment are minimal in terms of visual obstruction. The radio sites are in remote areas. Negative effects to visual quality are not anticipated by casual observers that may be in the vicinity of these sites. Lane Substation work would be indoors. Proposed actions are consistent with the sites' purpose and typical utility appearance.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary dust could be generated by work activities and there would be an imperceptible increase in vehicle exhaust during transportation to and from the sites.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor, temporary metallic noise would be generated by work on the towers and in the buildings. See Wildlife above.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: While the towers would not have the ladders safety system installed before the work would be scheduled, the installation contractor has verified that the current climbing systems are OSHA approved, and agree, in writing, that it is safe to proceed. All contractors would be expected to adhere to all BPA and OSHA safety requirements while performing the work.

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: See Human Health and Safety.

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: BPA has coordinated work schedules with the underlying land owners/managers as needed.

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

Signed: /s/ Nancy A. Wittpenn July 11, 2022
Nancy A. Wittpenn, ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist