

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Pine Mountain Radio Site and Harney Substation Latchways and other Communication Upgrades

Project No.: P00225

Project Manager: V. Charley Majors

Location: Deschutes and Harney 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) proposes to install work-safety fall protection equipment, better known as “latchways,” at its Pine Mountain Radio Site and Harney Substation. BPA would install the cable safety system on the vertical climbing path of the existing communication towers. This includes an anchor support beam installed near the top and bottom of the tower and brackets installed every 10 feet to connect the system to the tower and the anchor support beams. Once installed, workers would use the system when climbing the tower by attaching their harness to a specialized pulley that allows them to glide along the safety cable as they climb. The system at both locations would be attached to the existing ground mat.

At Harney Substation, the existing ladder on the tower used for climbing would need to be removed first before the new climbing system is installed. At Pine Mountain, BPA would also connect the existing microwave dishes on the tower to the waveguide and run the cables into the communication building.

Work at each site would require a line truck and 2-4 workers over 1 day. Intermittent noise would occur from the use of hand tools to install support beams, brackets, and cable.

BPA would use existing roads to access the sites. The proposed work would not require ground-disturbing activities or vegetation removal.

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:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel

Sarah T. Biegel
NEPA Compliance Officer

October 25, 2022

Date

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.

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Project Site Description

Pine Mountain Radio Site is located on the Deschutes National Forest and operates through an easement and special-use permit with the US Forest Service. At an elevation of 6150 feet, vegetation is sparse except for low-growing alpine grasses and some plants. The tree line begins about 600 feet downslope of the radio site and consists predominantly of higher altitude pines. Scattered rock outcrops occur and likely provide some habitat for local wildlife.

Harney Substation is located on BPA fee-owned land about 6.5 miles southwest of Burns, Oregon. At an elevation of 4160 feet, the area is typical of the drier, high desert environments east of the Cascades. The substation is nestled in a small valley near some pivot irrigation crop circles but the surrounding area around the substation mostly consists of shrub-scrub habitat.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On August 23, 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. While the Pine Mountain radio station was energized in 1968 within BPA's period of significance, it is not eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The Harney Substation was energized in 2004 and is not considered a historic resource.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or ground disturbance would occur in the graveled yards.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No plants occur within the graveled yards.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In addition to common types of wildlife found at these elevations in Deschutes and Harney counties, there have been golden eagle nests historically documented within a mile of the Pine Mountain Radio Site and one as close as a ¼ mile of the radio site. Eagle activity was observed by the USFS in summer 2022 but no nests have been found. No other Federal or state special-status wildlife species or habitats occur in the area, nor at Harney Substation.

Notes:

- Since work at Pine Mountain is tentatively scheduled to occur in spring 2023 during the raptor nesting period, the USFS would plan to survey the area as soon as weather permits to confirm whether eagles or other raptors are active in the area. If they are, BPA would wait to conduct the Pine Mountain work until clearance is given by the USFS.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No water bodies, floodplains, or fish are present at the sites.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present near or at the sites.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No excavation or ground disturbance would occur at the sites.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur within the existing sites and is an allowed use. All required notification to the USFS would occur before work begins.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The brackets and cables are minor additions that would not change the overall visual character of the sites.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Small amounts of dust and vehicle emissions may occur while traveling to the sites on existing access roads.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Intermittent noise would occur during daylight hours that may disturb wildlife that may be present in the vicinity. See Wildlife above. Operational noise would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Contractors would follow required safety plans developed per BPA requirements. Latchways would increase climbing safety into the future on the tower at these sites.

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: BPA Realty and the Project Manager would coordinate required notification protocol with the USFS before work begins. BPA has access road rights to the Pine Mountain location. No notification to surrounding landowners is needed at Harney Substation.

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 October 25, 2022
Nancy A. Wittpenn Date
Environmental Protection Specialist