Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Blyn Radio Station VHF Radio System Upgrade

Project No.: P01237

Project Manager: Ben Younce, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Jefferson, WA

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

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA is proposing to replace its aging VHF two-way radio system at the Blyn Radio Station (hereinafter, "Blyn") with a modern system as part of BPA's Mobile-Radio Essential Data Infrastructure program. Required by field personnel for communication with each other and with data control centers, an upgraded VHF system would help improve the processing of field-originated voice radio calls. A necessity for communications in the often remote BPA service area, mobile VHF radios allow personnel to get their field requests routed through dispatch in real-time. Additionally, all radio users in the vicinity of the originating call can hear the communications ("all-informed" radio traffic) and thus actions ordered have a veracity and awareness check.

All work at Blyn would be inside the existing fenced and graveled facility yard. Inside the communication building, there would be multiple electronic equipment upgrades along with installation of new componentry storage racks. A small hole would be made in a structural wall to route a grounding wire to the outdoor buried ground ring. New coaxial cables transmitting VHF signal between external antennas and internal repeaters (radios that receive and transmit an original VHF signal) and associated equipment would be installed.

Outside the building, there would be up to five, 18-inch-deep potholes hand-dug to access and bond new equipment grounding wires to the station's buried ground ring. From the communication building to the tower, the VHF coaxial cable would be strung horizontally along a metal cable bridge (or, ice bridge) and vertically along the tower to two newly installed VHF whip-style antennas. These antennas are 20-feet-long, and 3-inches in diameter, and one would be placed as near to the top as possible, with the other about 40 feet lower on the tower.

Old equipment would be removed and recycled or disposed of following applicable BPA and/or state hazardous material handling guidelines.

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/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange Date: *March 3, 2020*
Katey C. Grange
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.

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Project Site Description

Blyn Radio Station is located in the northeastern corner of the Olympic Peninsula, in the foothills of the Olympic Mountains. At approximately 2,080 feet above sea level, the parcel on which the station is situated is owned by BPA and is inside a larger WA Department of Natural Resources (DNR)-owned parcel. The station is one of about ten distinct stations clustered on the Blyn peak. The surrounding landscape is a patchwork of conifer-dominated forest parcels in various stages of regrowth, the nearest of which appears about 30 years old. Access to the station is a well-defined and well-maintained gravel road.

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**	☑	☐
Explanation: The Area of Potential Effect for the proposed project (action) has been completely modified and artificially leveled. Because the proposed action would take place within the confines of the radio station and occur on existing structures, a BPA archeologist has determined that no further National Historic Preservation Act compliance action is needed. The action would be an undertaking, but no historic properties would be affected.		
2. **Geology and Soils**	☑	☐
Explanation: There would only be minor disturbance to the gravel and fill of the station yard; natural soils or geologic resources would not be affected.		
3. **Plants** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: No effects to plants would occur as all work would occur on man-made surfaces.		
4. **Wildlife** (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: Of the six potentially occurring threatened or endangered federal endangered species act (ESA)-listed species, marbled murrelet has been recorded as near as 1.5 miles in the relatively recent past. A field survey by BPA personnel of the 0.25-mile radius (the threshold disturbance distance for marbled murrelet) surrounding Blyn resulted in a finding of no suitable breeding habitat for marbled murrelet, and therefore the planned work would have no effect on the species. This would lead to the conclusion of no effect on fisher, a *proposed* threatened species that prefers similar habitat qualities to the murrelet. Project noise may disturb local, non-ESA-listed wildlife, but the noise would be temporary and generally consistent with other activities at the site.		
5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish** (including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: No water resources would be affected, and there would be no effect on fish.		

6.	**Wetlands**	☑	☐

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the work area.

7.	**Groundwater and Aquifers**	☑	☐

Explanation: In the unlikely event that groundwater is breached by hand digging the potholes in the yard, the work would not introduce any hazardous substances to the resource.

8.	**Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**	☑	☐

Explanation: The station parcel and communication building are owned by BPA, and the tower on which work would occur is owned by Puget Sound Energy (PSE). The work would constitute routine upgrades and would not interfere with any other uses on the Blyn peak, or in the surrounding DNR parcel.

Note:

- ✓ Finalize agreement with PSE on the work planned for the BPA equipment on the PSE tower. Do not proceed with tower equipment work until there is an agreement.

9.	**Visual Quality**	☑	☐

Explanation: The addition of the two thin (three-inch-diameter) whip VHF antennas would be a relatively minor addition to aerial equipment attached to the 150-foot-tall tower. There are about eight shielded parabolic dish antennas up to eight-feet-in-diameter that protrude outward in multiple locations on the tower. The two whips would be less visible at a distance than would the tower frame and the existing dish antennas.

10.	**Air Quality**	☑	☐

Explanation: There would be some increased work-vehicle traffic to and from the site while work is taking place, but the small quantities of emissions would readily mix and be diluted shortly after the activity.

11.	**Noise**	☑	☐

Explanation: The work noise levels would be comparable to typical radio facility maintenance.

12.	**Human Health and Safety**	☑	☐

Explanation: Public health and safety would not be impacted from the work that would be localized to restricted radio station grounds. Health and safety of construction personnel would not be adversely impacted because OSHA or BPA safety guidelines would be followed. BPA employee safety during subsequent regional field operations should benefit from the project through better coverage and/or reliability of the two-way radio communication network.

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

Description: An agreement would need to be finalized with PSE to work on the tower equipment. BPA owns the underlying land in fee and can access the station freely, needing no other permissions to perform the work as described here.

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

Signed: */s/ Michael J. O'Connell* Date: *March 3, 2020*
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist