

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Horse Butte and Birch Creek Radio Upgrades

Project No.: P05488

Project Manager: Vincent Majors - TEPF

Location: Bonneville County, Idaho

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.19 Microwave, meteorological and radio towers, B1.3 Routine maintenance, B4.6 Additions and modifications to transmission facilities.

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace the 6 GHz digital radio equipment system located at Horse Butte and Birch Creek Radio Stations with a new 7/8 GHz system. The replacement of the radio equipment is needed due to the current radio path being unreliable because of inadequate frequency spacing and reflection potential. Additionally, the current 6 GHz radio paths associated with the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems wind generation facility located nearby does not meet the BPA reliability standards for the generation capacity. The new 7/8 GHz radios and antennas would be like existing radio equipment and would not increase the amount of antennas on each respective tower.

In addition to new radio equipment, the current towers would be extended to increase their heights. Horse Butte would be increased by 30 feet to a new height of 60 feet. Birch Creek would be increased by 40 feet to a new height of 120 feet. The towers are self-supporting and would not need any additional guying to support the height increases. In addition to tower extensions, the required latchway safety climb system would be installed on the towers.

Construction would occur during the Fall of 2023 and crews would access each site using the existing road networks. Equipment used would include bucket trucks, a small crane, pick-up trucks, and various hand tools. Decommissioned radio equipment would be disposed of in approved facilities.

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/ Nicholas Johnson

Nicholas Johnson
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel August 16, 2023

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: Horse Butte and Birch Creek Radio Upgrades

Project Site Description

The project locations are located in Bonneville County, Idaho. Birch Creek is located approximately 22 miles northeast and Horse Butte is located 18 miles southeast, of Idaho Falls, Idaho. The Horse Butte project area is in Section 26 of Township 1 North, Range 40 East and the Birch Creek Project area is located in Section 2 of Township 2 North, Range 41 East. The project areas are located within sparsely forested foothills above agricultural and livestock grazing fields. Birch Creek communication site is located on top of a plateau next to the Utah Associated Municipal Power Systems wind generation facility. Vegetation near the project areas consists of many grasses, shrubs, and trees that are endemic to the Dissected Plateaus and Teton Basin ecoregion.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed project was reviewed by a BPA archaeologist and it was determined that there is no potential to cause effects to historical or cultural resources. BPA archaeologists issued a no potential to cause effects on historic properties memorandum dated April 10, 2023.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Projects actions would not affect geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project actions would not affect plants. No Federal or state special-status species are known to occur within the project areas.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Some species may temporarily avoid the area during the short construction window. There are no Federal or special-status species or habitats that would be impacted by the project actions.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no water bodies, floodplains, or fish present within the project area.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands present within the project area; therefore, there would be no effects to wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project actions would not affect groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA project would not result in any land use changes. There are no specially-designated areas near the project location.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The new tower structures would be slightly taller than their current height and would not result in a significant visual change. The project would not result in any substantial changes to the visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during construction; however, there would be no substantial changes to air quality during or after construction.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change substantially.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not affect 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: 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 staff would notify the underlying landowners of each site and along routes of access along with adjacent landowners of the construction schedule. No other notifications would be required for the project

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

Signed: /s/ Nicholas Johnson August 16, 2023
Nicholas Johnson Date
Environmental Protection Specialist