

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: MREDI – Malaga and Merritt

Project Manager: Ben Younce, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Chelan County, Washington

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 upgrade its VHF radio system at two sites in its Ellensburg and Grand Coulee Radio Regions. The upgrades would include the addition of indoor equipment and replacement of antennas at BPA's existing Malaga and Merritt Radio Station sites. The project would help replace BPA's aging VHF radio system with a simple, modern radio system with improved voice coverage for remote field personnel.

At the **Malaga Radio Station**, a new 10-foot microwave dish would be installed, at the 20-foot level of an existing 70-foot-tall lattice tower. A new waveguide would connect the antennas to the indoor equipment. A grounding bar would be positioned beneath the entrance point of the waveguide into the equipment building. Other equipment, including a new radio system, equipment rack, and a router would be installed inside the equipment building. An existing 20-foot-tall monopole tower, with a 10-foot microwave dish, would be removed from the western side of the radio site facility by unbolting the tower from its foundation. The tower foundation would be left intact. An unimproved access road would be used to drive a crane to the western side of the facility to remove the 20-foot monopole.

At the existing **Merritt Radio Station**, the existing monopole foundation would be removed and replaced with a new 9-foot-wide by 9-foot-wide by 3-foot deep concrete slab. This work would require that the existing 20-foot tall monopole, microwave dish and waveguide bridge be temporarily removed and stored onsite and would be reinstalled after the concrete has cured. A 6-foot-wide microwave dish would be removed from the 20-foot-tall monopole radio tower, and replaced with a new 8-foot-wide microwave dish. One new VHF whip antenna would replace the existing VHF whip antenna at the top of the monopole. A new waveguide and coaxial cable would also be installed on the tower. Various indoor equipment, including equipment racks and a repeater, would be removed and replaced in the equipment building. Fall-prevention hardware would also be installed on the monopole tower. Several small conifer trees would be removed to prevent future interference with the beam path of the new antennas.

Fall protection systems would be installed on both towers to increase safety for tower maintenance workers. This system would include installation of an anchor support beam near the top of the structure, along with a series of brackets, approximately ten feet apart, with a top and bottom anchor.

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/ Beth Belanger

Beth Belanger
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Carol Leiter

Carol Leiter
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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|----------------------------|------------------------|
| <u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u> | <u>August 24, 2021</u> |
| Sarah T. Biegel | Date |
| NEPA Compliance Officer | |

Attachment: 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: MREDI – Merritt and Malaga

Project Site Description

The sites are in Chelan County, Washington, at existing radio tower facilities.

The Malaga Radio Station is approximately five miles south of Wenatchee, Washington. It is in Section 17, Township 21 North, Range 21 East. The site is situated atop a ridge, in an area that is undeveloped, except for a few residences and a transmission corridor, located approximately 0.30 miles south of the radio station. An unnamed stream is located 0.25 miles east of the site. The radio station is approximately 4,725 feet in elevation.

The Merritt Radio Station is in the Wenatchee National Forest, approximately 30 miles northwest of Wenatchee, Washington. It is in Section 2, Township 26 North, Range 16 East. The site is on the east slope of the Cascade Mountain Range, approximately one-mile north of Highway 2. An unnamed stream is located 0.25 miles west of the site. The radio station is approximately 5,400 feet in elevation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On March 5, 2020, a Section 106 initiation letter for the proposed activities at the Malaga radio station was sent to the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Yakama Nation, and Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP). On March 12, 2020, a Section 106 initiation letter for proposed activities at the Merritt radio station was sent to the Colville Tribe, Yakama Nation, DAHP, and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). On March 9th and 16th, 2020, DAHP concurred with the proposed Area of Potential Effects (APE) for Malaga and Merritt radio stations, respectively.

On June 28, 2021, BPA sent a cultural survey report and a determination letter stating the proposed project would have no adverse effects to historical resources to the consulting parties for the Malaga project. DAHP, Yakama Nation, and the Colville Reservation concurred with BPA's determination on June 28, July 15, and 16, 2021, respectively.

On July 14, 2021, the cultural survey report and a no adverse effect determination letter were sent to the consulting parties for the Merritt project. DAHP, Yakama Nation, and the USFS concurred with the determination on July 14, 15, and 19, 2021, respectively. To date, no response has been received from the Colville Tribe.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The antenna replacements, equipment removal, and tower removal at Malaga would not require any ground disturbance. Tree removal near the Merritt site may result in minor ground disturbance; however, the tree stumps would be left intact onsite. There would be no impacts to geology and soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal/state special-status species or habitats at either site that would be impacted by the work. The work at both sites would occur after plants have senesced. The two trees slated for removal near the Merritt radio station are a native grand fir (*Abies grandis*) and ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*), approximately 35 to 45-feet-tall and 12-inches in diameter.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There are no Federal/state special-status species or habitats at the Malaga radio station that would be impacted by the project. The Merritt site is in Northern spotted owl designated critical habitat. BPA has worked with the underlying landowner, USFS, to determine that the proposed project is consistent with the USFS's Programmatic Biological Assessment for Forest-wide Low Impact Management Activities. USFS determined that these types of activities have a potential to affect but not adversely affect spotted owls and/or spotted owl critical habitat, which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) concurred with on May 8, 2019. The Merritt Radio Station upgrades are part of the USFS Special Use Authorization (Permit) Program. Additionally, the USFS District Biologist has determined that the nearest nesting habitat is over 400 meters away from the site. There are no other Federal/state special-status species at the Merritt site that would be impacted by project activities.

Notes:

- Tree removal would occur after August 15, to minimize impacts to nesting migratory birds.

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 habitats in, or near, either site that would be affected by project activities.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands at either location that would be impacted by the project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed excavation for the new concrete foundation at Merritt would be approximately 3.5-feet-deep and would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The land use would not change at either location. There are no specially-designated areas near the project locations.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The visual quality would be unchanged and would remain consistent with the existing use of the radio station sites.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

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

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

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

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activities all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or safety. The installation of fall protection systems on the towers would increase worker safety overall.

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: Both sites are in remote locations. Neither site has neighbors in close proximity; therefore, adjacent landowner notification and coordination would not be required. BPA has coordinated with the underlying landowner, USFS, for the Merritt project.

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

Signed: /s/ Beth Belanger August 24, 2021
Beth Belanger – ECT-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC