

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: North Bend Radio Station VHF Radio System Upgrades

Project No.: P01237

Project Manager: Ben Younce, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: King 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) is proposing to upgrade its aging, two-way, very high frequency (VHF) radio system at its North Bend Radio Station (“North Bend” hereinafter) with a simpler, more modern system. Field personnel use the VHF system for communication with each other and with data control centers. The replacement would help improve voice coverage and better ensure BPA meets 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” VHF system upgrades program.

At North Bend, the work planned would constitute the *backhaul* element of the Mobile-REDI effort. Backhaul refers to packaging of field-originated VHF voice data to microwave signal that is sent via microwave antennas to data control centers for processing and routing. Internal communications building work under backhaul would include the moving and installation of support racks, replacement of old with new electronic communications equipment such as a VHF router, and a network management system (NMS) terminal server. Likewise, there would be replacement of supporting AC and DC electrical sources, circuit breakers, and the power and network connections for the new communications equipment. The previously-installed VHF repeater radio would be connected to the coaxial cable leading to the previously-installed VHF whip-style antenna on the existing 70-foot-tall communications tower.

Ground bars (connection hubs to electrically ground equipment to the external buried ground mat) would be installed on the interior and exterior of the communication building. In the graveled station yard there would need to be about five 18- to 30-inch-deep potholes excavated by hand to access the ground mat and weld the ground wires to the mat.

Other work would include the installation of new heating/ventilation/air conditioning (HVAC) units in the communication building. The current HVAC needs outpace the existing air conditioning and heating units. Two large (over 6 feet in height) HVAC units would be installed on the exterior southwest wall of the communications building. There would need to be mechanized cutting and drilling of holes in the wall to mount the units and platforms to perform maintenance on them. Finish work on the interior and exterior walls would be needed to fill, smooth and paint around the new units and in areas where the existing units and their ventilation registers would be

decommissioned. All necessary grounding and electrical connections for the HVAC units would be completed under this effort.

BPA would perform abatement of existing hazardous materials (typically, lead and asbestos) as needed before any work begins. After installation, all equipment would be connected and tested. Any obsolete equipment would be removed and properly disposed of as needed.

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 12/3/2021
Katey C. Grange 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: North Bend Radio Station VHF Radio System Upgrades

Project Site Description

North Bend Radio Station is a small (0.1 acre) BPA-owned radio station at 3,250-Foot elevation on the western edge of the Washington Department of Natural Resources-managed Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area. Working forests composed of mixed conifers surround the station, with parcels in various stages of regrowth. No surface water resources are apparent within about 0.2 miles of the station grounds.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA Historian and a BPA Contract Archaeologist have reviewed the undertaking and determined the activity has no potential to cause effects to historic properties. The Area of Potential Effect is within an area that has been modified and artificially leveled during building construction, and a majority of the North Bend Radio Station has been surveyed previously (2014 Day and Schmidt). No cultural resources were identified as part of the 2014 survey.

Constructed in 1954, the radio station was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 2019 (BPA Microwave Radio Stations Technical Report, AECOM 2019). The Manual for Built Resources Microwave Radio Sites Addendum (AECOM 2020) provides treatment guidance to navigate the Section 106 regulatory process. The project does have activities that require screening by the BPA Historian and it was determined that the planned work would not affect the character defining of features of the radio station. Therefore, the activities do not require Section 106 consultation.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All ground disturbance would be limited to the previously-disturbed graveled yard, mainly between the radio tower and the supporting building, and would include up to five manually dug holes in the yard to the depth of the grounding mat (18-30 inches below the ground surface).

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would be limited to inside the unvegetated, graveled radio station grounds.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The project would produce intermittent noise during HVAC installation that may cause temporary disturbance to adjacent wildlife. The station is inside a Northern spotted owl (US Fish and Wildlife Service [USFWS] Endangered Species Act [ESA]-listed threatened) management circle associated with a historic observation. Marbled murrelet, an ESA-listed threatened species, has potential to occur in proximity to the radio station and has similar breeding habitat requirements to the Northern spotted owl. While no recent observations have been recorded, the USFWS has consulted on a recent BPA project at the station noting that potential habitat is within the area of potential disturbance by noise produced by work at the station (consultation number 01EWF00-2019-I-0674, dated March 26, 2019). The HVAC and other installations and associated work for this project would be within the scope and range of effects discussed in the previous consultation. In keeping with the previous USFWS informal consultation on tower work at the site (which produced noise at heights at or above potential nest heights) this ground-level effort for the HVAC and VHF infrastructure installations *may affect, but is not likely to adversely affect*, Northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet when performed between July 16 and March 1.

Notes:

- Follow the USFWS guidance at the site and perform work between July 16 and March 1.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no water features in close proximity to the station.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Excavation is planned to stop at the grounding mat underlying the station yard. The potholes would be hand excavated and therefore any contact with a water table would not result in potential contamination by hazardous fluids. After access to the grounding mat and any needed repairs or bonding by welding, the potholes would be backfilled with the excavated material.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All work would occur within the radio station grounds that has been in operation per longstanding agreement with the Washington DNR. The Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area would be unaffected by the external changes to the communications building from the HVAC work. The units have a low profile and would have character consistent with the rest of the station facilities.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The HVAC installation on the exterior of the communications building would be minimal in terms of visual obstruction and would be anticipated to cause no disturbance to casual observers. The units would be in keeping with the site's purpose and typical appearance. Additionally, due to the continuous operation of the station since 1954, and the surrounding landscape that is shaped by industrial forestry, the elements proposed for installation at the station would have no effect on visual quality at the location.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The work would require multiple trips by four-wheel-drive passenger trucks and vehicles with little or no idling needed. There would be only temporary and localized decreases in air quality from vehicle exhaust that would resolve upon work completion.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be loud power tools used to cut holes in the wall and install the HVAC units. Loud banging would occur from the interior work. These and other more minor noises could rise above standard maintenance work noise levels, but they would be temporary and occur only during typical working hours.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All workers would be expected to adhere to all BPA and OSHA safety requirements in performance of the work. Asbestos and lead-containing materials, for instance, would be handled and disposed of using BPA-approved protocols.

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 has coordinated with the underlying land manager (WA DNR). All project elements would be in keeping with requirements of working in the Rattlesnake Mountain Scenic Area.

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 12/3/2021
Michael J. O'Connell Date
Environmental Protection Specialist