

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Hall Ridge Radio Station Replacement

Project Manager: Courtney Kimmel, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Marion County, 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Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to replace its aging and outdated very high frequency (VHF) two-way radio and ground-level equipment enclosure at the Hall Ridge Radio Station located on the Willamette National Forest near Detroit, Marion County, Oregon. BPA's VHF radio system is used by field personnel for communication in real-time with each other and with data control centers. The upgrade at Hall Ridge Radio Station would be coordinated with similar efforts at many radio stations as part of BPA's Mobile-Radio Essential Data Infrastructure (MREDI) program. The MREDI program seeks to improve voice coverage and the processing of field-originated voice radio calls across BPA's service area, which is required for safe facilities maintenance and operations and to ensure reliable power transmission.

BPA would demolish the existing approximately 6.5-foot by 10-foot radio equipment enclosure. A new, prefabricated 8-foot by 10-foot equipment enclosure with integrated solar power (i.e., a solar panel array and battery bank) would be installed in approximately the same location as the demolished enclosure. The new enclosure would be mounted on ground pads, which require no additional excavation or ground disturbance. BPA would install one VHF repeater antenna and one ultra-high frequency (UHF) antenna on BPA's existing 70-foot steel communications tower. Additional radio equipment would be installed within the new equipment shelter.

All debris and decommissioned equipment would be removed from the site and properly disposed of following all applicable local, state, and federal regulations. The new equipment enclosure would be brought to the site on a flatbed truck. No modifications to the existing communications structure or access road work would be required. The project would be completed over the span of two days in early September 2023.

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/ Walker Stinnette

Walker Stinnette

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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.

Proposed Action: Hall Ridge Radio Station Replacement

Project Site Description

The project site is located at BPA's existing Hall Ridge Radio Station on the Willamette National Forest near Detroit, Marion County, Oregon (Township 10 South, Range 5 East, Section 8). All work would occur within areas that are graveled and sparsely vegetated with common, low-growing grasses, forbs, and weeds. No surface waters or wetlands are present within or near the project site. Multiple additional radio stations maintained and operated by other entities are located in close proximity to the BPA facility. The project site is surrounded by undeveloped forested land that recently burned in a forest fire.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: On April 17, 2023, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde
- Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon
- United States Forest Service - Willamette National Forest
- Oregon State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)

The Hall Ridge Radio Station was determined eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places (NHRP) in 2019. BPA determined that the proposed undertaking, demolition of the radio station equipment enclosure, would be an adverse effect due to the loss of the eligible resource. A Memorandum of Agreement between BPA and SHPO was signed on August 18, 2023. No other comments were received from the consulting parties.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause minor soil disturbance from demolition of the existing equipment enclosure and soil compaction and rutting due to vehicle and equipment use. Standard construction best management practices (BMPs) would be implemented to minimize soil erosion, sedimentation, and fugitive dust. The proposed action would not impact geology.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could crush, strip, or cover a minor amount of common, low-growing grasses, forbs, and weeds, where present within the project site. There are no documented occurrences of any special-status plant species near the project site, and no suitable special-status species habitat is present.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project site is located within 0.1 miles of northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*) designated critical habitat, and there are documented occurrences of the species within 1 mile. Northern spotted owl is listed as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. The proposed action would result in disturbance levels similar to routine access and short-term maintenance. No northern spotted owl habitat modification would occur, and work is scheduled for early September, which is outside of the critical nesting period for the species. Therefore, the proposed action would have no effect on northern spotted owl or designated critical habitat.

Minor and temporary disturbance of normal wildlife behavior and wildlife displacement could occur. However, there would be no modification of wildlife habitat, and temporarily disturbed or displaced wildlife would likely reoccupy the site following completion of the proposed action.

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-bearing streams are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact water bodies or floodplains and would have no effect on special-status fish species or habitats.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present within or near the project site. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance would not reach depths to groundwater, and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action is consistent with existing land use at the project site. No specially-designated areas would be impacted by the proposed action.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in a perceptible change in the appearance the site. However, these changes would be minor relative to the scale of existing structures and equipment and would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area. The project site is not located in a visually sensitive area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would produce minor and temporary dust and vehicle emissions in the local area. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would result in minor and temporary noise during daylight hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). No noise-sensitive land uses are located near the project site, and there would be no permanent change in ambient noise following completion of the proposed action.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Prior to demolishing the radio equipment enclosure, the structure would be tested for hazardous materials, which if found, then would be disposed of off-site according to all local, state, and federal regulations. No impacts to human health and safety are expected as a result of project activities.

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: The project site is located on the USFS-managed Willamette National Forest. BPA has notified USFS of the proposed action and would acquire any necessary authorizations. BPA would notify and coordinate with other entities operating nearby radio sites, if required.

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

Signed: /s/ Walker Stinnette August 22, 2023
Walker Stinnette Date
Environmental Protection Specialist