

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Verizon Fiber Installation at Biddle Butte Radio Station

**Project No.:** LURR 20240080

**Project Manager:** Billie Woodman – TERR-ROSS MHQA

**Location:** Skamania County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers, B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable, B4.9 Multiple use of powerline rights-of-way

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to allow Verizon Wireless to place new overhead and underground fiber cables and two vaults crossing BPA's fee-owned land at Biddle Butte Radio Station. Verizon Wireless general contractors would bring overhead fiber onto the property and connect it to an existing wood pole. From the wood pole, the fiber would then be brought underground into a new 17 inch wide by 30 inch long by 24-inch-deep fiber vault. Approximately 185 feet of new fiber would be installed in a 4-inch-diameter conduit from the vault to an existing Verizon equipment building. Trenching for conduit installation would be approximately 12 inches wide by 36 inches deep and would occur on existing gravel surfaces. A 17-inch-wide by 30-inch-long by 24-inch-deep fiber pull vault would be installed near Verizon's equipment building.

BPA authorizes the use of and manages its fee-owned lands pursuant to its authority under sections 2(e) and 2(f) of the Bonneville Project Act. 16 U.S.C. § 832a(e)-(f).

**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; 89 FR 34074, April 30, 2024), 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.<sup>1</sup>

Beth Belanger  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Attachment: Environmental Checklist

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<sup>1</sup> BPA is aware of the November 12, 2024, decision in *Marin Audubon Society v. Federal Aviation Administration*, No. 23-1067 (D.C. Cir. Nov. 12, 2024). To the extent that a court may conclude that the Council on Environmental Quality regulations implementing NEPA are not judicially enforceable or binding on this agency action, BPA has nonetheless elected to follow those regulations at 40 Code Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) §§ 1500– 1508, in addition to the US Department of Energy’s NEPA implementing procedures at 10 C.F.R. Part § 1021, to meet the agency’s obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 *et seq.*

# 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:** Verizon Fiber Installation at Biddle Butte Radio Station

## **Project Site Description**

The project site is on Bonneville Power Administration's fee-owned land at its Biddle Butte Radio Station located in Township 1 North, Range 5 East, Section 9, Skamania County, WA. The graveled site is developed with two radio towers and multiple equipment buildings. The surrounding area is undeveloped forested areas, agriculture, and rural residential homes. Three headwater streams are located within 0.20 to 0.25 miles from the project location. The nearest wetland recorded on the National Wetland Inventory is located over 0.5 miles to the west. The Columbia River is located 1.7 miles to the south.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The BPA archaeologist determined that no historic properties would be affected by the project. On October 25, 2024, BPA sent determination letters to the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Cowlitz Indian Tribe, the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) and the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area US Forest Service office. DAHP concurred with the finding on October 28, 2024. No other responses were received.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to geology and minimal impacts to soils. Soils would be excavated to a maximum depth of three feet during trenching activities. The excavated soils would be used to backfill the trench once the conduit and fiber have been installed. Gravel would be placed on top of the backfilled trench route to restore the area to its current condition. Best management practices would be utilized to prevent soil erosion during construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status species or habitats in the project area that would be affected by project activities. The project area is devoid of vegetation.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no Federal or state special-status species or habitats that would be affected by project activities. The work would occur in previously disturbed areas, and no habitat would be removed. There are no ESA-listed or sensitive terrestrial wildlife occurrences within five miles of the project area.

#### **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 habitat at or near the project location; therefore, there would be no impact to these resources.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands at or near the project location; therefore, there would be no impacts to wetlands.

#### **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effects to groundwater or aquifers because the maximum depth of disturbance would be 3 feet deep.

#### **8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effects to land use or specially-designated areas. The site would continue to operate as a radio communications site. The site is within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (CRGNSA). The project proponent, Verizon's representative, has confirmed with the Skamania County Planning Department that the fiber installation is an allowed use under the County's Zoning General Regulations for the CRGNSA.

#### **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no changes to the visual quality surrounding the project area because the work would occur underground and the site is surrounded by a forest that obscures the view from public areas.

#### **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A slight temporary increase in vehicle and equipment emissions and dust may occur during construction but there would be no change to air quality at the site following project completion.

## 11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Project-related noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. There would be no long-term changes to noise levels after construction has been completed.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no impact to 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: The project site is on BPA fee-owned land and would not require any additional landowner notifications, involvement or coordination.

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

Signed:

Beth Belanger  
Environmental Protection Specialist