

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION

Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration

**Poncha-Canon West-Midway Fiber Optic Addition
El Paso, Pueblo, Fremont, and Chaffee Counties, Colorado**

- A. Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (Western) proposes to install a 48-count overhead fiber optic ground wire (OPGW) on Western's existing Midway - Canon West - Poncha 230-kV Transmission Line between Midway - Poncha (MID - PON) Substations. In addition, the OPGW will replace one existing overhead ground wire (OGW). Termination of the OPGW will be required at each intermediate substation. Other necessary splice locations will be determined by and communicated by the construction contractor, after contract award. This will be a joint project between Tri-State Generation & Transmission Association, Inc. and Western. Each party will be entitled to 24 fibers on the OPGW line. All work would be confined to Western's right-of-way (ROW) easement. Existing access would be used and no new roads are proposed. The project is located in El Paso, Pueblo, Fremont, and Chaffee Counties, Colorado. Work is scheduled to start in 2015.

New construction action proposed for MID - PON 230-kV Transmission Line includes the following:

- 1) Western proposes to replace existing OGW with 48-fiber OPGW on 88 miles of existing 230-kV Midway - Canon West - Poncha 230-kV Transmission Line.
 - a. Install/Replace proper hardware assemblies on existing structures.
- 2) Western proposes to terminate OPGW in the Midway - Canon West - Poncha Substations.
 - a. Midway - Terminate OPGW on existing take off structure (TOS) (Bay V2).
 - b. Canon West - Terminate OPGW on existing TOS (Bay V1 and V3).
 - c. Poncha - Terminate OPGW at Structure 82/5 in existing splice box.
- 3) Install fiber patch panels at Midway and Canon West control buildings.
- 4) Type of equipment to be utilized is a spool trailer, pickup, bucket truck, and possibly a helicopter. All equipment utilized would be rubber-tired vehicles.

- B. Number and Title of the Categorical Exclusion Being Applied:** (See text in 10 CFR Part 1021, Subpart D.)

B4.7 Fiber optic cable.

Adding fiber optic cables to transmission facilities or burying fiber optic cable in existing powerline or pipeline rights-of-way. Covered actions may include associated vaults and pulling and tensioning sites outside of rights-of-way in nearby previously disturbed or developed areas.

- C. Regulatory Requirements in 10 CFR 1021.410 (b):** (See full text in regulation and attached checklist.)

- 1) The proposed action fits within a class of actions listed in Appendix A or B to Subpart D.

For classes of actions listed in Appendix B, the following conditions are integral elements. To fit within a class, the proposal must not:

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- Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders;
 - Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities;
 - 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;
 - Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order, statute, or regulation by Federal, State, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to, those listed in paragraph B. (4) (see Attachment A).
- 2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.
- 3) The proposal is not “connected” to other actions with potentially significant impacts, is not related to other proposed actions with cumulatively significant impacts, and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or 10 CFR 1021.211.

D. Special Stipulations Pertaining to the Proposal:

If the scope of work of this project changes, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for additional environmental review.

This Categorical Exclusion is valid only from signature date through the end of calendar year 2015. If construction has not commenced within that time, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review prior to construction.

Mitigation measures must be followed as identified in the attached Fort Carson Directorate of Public Works, Environmental Division, Record of Environmental Consideration and Fugitive Dust Control Plan.

There will be no maintenance of access roads or ground disturbing activity anticipated in this project. No road maintenance or ground disturbing activity will occur without prior coordination with Western’s Regional Preservation Officer. If ground disturbance is necessary for equipment at pulling sites or access to structures, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted 60 days prior to construction to obtain clearances and locations of potential avoidance areas. Cultural monitors may be required. It is the responsibility of the contractor to provide mapped locations of anticipated ground disturbing activity 60 days prior

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to construction in order to allow Western to provide environmental monitors during construction.

If any cultural materials are discovered during construction, work in the area shall halt immediately, Western's Regional Preservation Officer shall be contacted, and the material be evaluated by an archaeologist or historian meeting the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualification Standards (48 FR 22716, Sept. 1983).

Limit movement of construction crews and equipment within the maintenance corridor, including access routes, to minimize damage beyond the ROW corridor. Maintenance activities shall be conducted to minimize scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the vicinity of the work. Except where terrain damage results from trenching activity, terrain and vegetation shall be preserved and protected from damage by maintenance crew operations and equipment. If operations or equipment causes terrain damage, the maintenance crew repairs the damage.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, maintenance work should be scheduled outside the March 1 through July 31 general nesting periods. If the OPGW work is to be done during this period, contact Western's Environmental Division so that they may arrange for a pedestrian survey to be conducted in advance of the contractor crews to identify active nests that are to be avoided. The contractor must coordinate with the avian nest surveyors prior to construction and avoid any active nests deemed necessary.

Western has a clean vehicle policy and all equipment used must be cleaned prior to use in order to prevent transporting of invasive plant or noxious weed seeds. Operators will be required to wash all machinery (trailers, trucks, UTVs, etc.) before entering the action area and working on the project to prevent transport of non-native invasive species.

- E. Determination:** Based on my review of information provided to me and in my possession concerning the proposed action, I determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class of actions, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is categorically excluded from requirements for an EA or an EIS.


Signature

Date: 2/25/15

Gene Iley, Jr.
NEPA Compliance Officer
Rocky Mountain Customer Service Region
Western Area Power Administration

Prepared by: Tim Snowden

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ATTACHMENT A

**Conditions That Are Integral Elements of the Classes
of Actions in Appendix B That Apply to This Proposal**
Checklist for Categorical Exclusion Determination, revised Nov. 2011

Application of Categorical Exclusions (1021.410)	Disagree	Agree	Unknown
(b)(1) The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in appendix B to subpart D.		X	
(b)(2) There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal, including, but not limited to, scientific controversy about the environmental effects of the proposal; uncertain effects or effects involving unique or unknown risks; and unresolved conflicts concerning alternate uses of available resources.		X	
(b)(3) The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion. Segmentation can occur when a proposal is broken down into small parts in order to avoid the appearance of significance of the total action. The scope of a proposal must include the consideration of connected and cumulative actions, that is, the proposal is not connected to other actions with potentially significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.25(a)(1)), is not related to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant impacts (40 CFR 1508.27(b)(7)), and is not precluded by 40 CFR 1506.1 or § 1021.211 of this part concerning limitations on actions during EIS preparation.		X	
B. Conditions that are Integral Elements of the Classes of Actions in Appendix B.	NO	YES	Unknown
(1) Threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety and health, or similar requirements of DOE or Executive Orders.	X		
(2) Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators), but the proposal may include categorically excluded waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment actions or facilities.	X		
(3) 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.	X		
(4) Have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources. An environmentally sensitive resource is typically a resource that has been identified as needing protection through Executive Order,	X		

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statue, or regulation by Federal, state, or local government, or a federally recognized Indian tribe. An action may be categorically excluded if, although sensitive resources are present, the action would not have the potential to cause significant impacts on those resources (such as construction of a building with its foundation well above a sole-source aquifer or upland surface soil removal on a site that has wetlands). Environmentally sensitive resources include, but are not limited to:			
(i) Property (such as sites, buildings, structures, and objects) of historic, archaeological, or architectural significance designated by a Federal, state, or local government, or property determined to be eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places;	X		
(ii) Federally-listed threatened or endangered species or their habitat (including critical habitat) or Federally-proposed or candidate species or their habitat (Endangered Species Act); state-listed or state-proposed endangered or threatened species or their habitat; Federally-protected marine mammals and Essential Fish Habitat (Marine Mammal Protection Act; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act); and otherwise Federally-protected species (such as under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act or the Migratory Bird Treaty Act);	X		
(iii) Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, —Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);	X		
(iv) Areas having a special designation such as Federally- and state-designated wilderness areas, national parks, national monuments, national natural landmarks, wild and scenic rivers, state and Federal wildlife refuges, scenic areas (such as National Scenic and Historic Trails or National Scenic Areas), and marine sanctuaries;	X		
(v) Prime or unique farmland, or other farmland of statewide or local importance, as defined at 7 CFR 658.2(a), —Farmland Protection Policy Act: Definitions, or its successor;	X		
(vi) Special sources of water (such as sole-source aquifers, wellhead protection areas, and other water sources that are vital in a region); and	X		
(vii) Tundra, coral reefs, or rain forests; or	X		

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(5) 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.	X		
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