Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Hatwai Substation VHF Radio System Upgrade

Project No.: P01237

Project Manager: Molly Kovaka, TEP-CSB-2

Location: Nez Perce County, ID

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.19 Microwave, meteorological, and radio towers

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA is proposing to replace the aging VHF radio system at its Hatwai Substation in Nez Perce County, Idaho with a modern VHF radio system. The replacement would help improve voice coverage across BPA's service area and is coordinated with similar efforts at many VHF stations under BPA's "Mobile-REDI" project.

A grounding bar and lightning-protection equipment would be installed in the control house and would be bonded to the existing grounding mat within the station yard. Hand-excavation of up to five 18-inch-deep holes to perform the grounding mat bonding would be the only ground-disturbing activity for the project.

Components of the existing interior charger rack would be replaced, or upgraded, to accommodate new equipment. Electronic equipment supporting the radio system backhaul data network – a system of radios, fiber, and phone lines that takes information from remote field sites back to BPA's core communication network and control centers – would be installed in new or existing interior communications racks.

Existing building wall ports would be used to host new coaxial cabling for transmitting new VHF antenna signal from the lattice steel tower to the control house. Two 20-foot-tall VHF rod antennas would be installed on the lattice tower at 65- and 125-foot heights. An existing 6-foot-diameter, parabolic microwave antenna and its waveguide housing (angular conduit) would be removed from the monopole that is adjacent to the lattice tower.

Lastly, new VHF radios ('repeaters') would be installed in the communication building and connected to the antennas and coaxial cable. All old equipment would be retired from the site and either disposed of or returned to inventory for spares or parts.

Work would be conducted over a two-year period, starting in the late summer/early fall of 2017.

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, July 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 O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Enviornmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ SarahT. Biegel Date: *August 28, 2017*
Sarah T. Biegel
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.

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Project Site Description

Located in semiarid northwest Idaho in Nez Perce County, Hatwai Substation is situated on a plateau with unobstructed 360-degree views. It is just inside the northwestern boundary of the Nez Perce Tribal Reservation. The vegetation is composed of the herbaceous plant species typically associated with the converted Palouse Prairie grassland type like native and non-native perennial grasses or agricultural fields. The streams in the vicinity are intermittent in nature.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
1. **Historic and Cultural Resources**	☑	☐
Explanation: The BPA archaeologist determined the project would have no potential to cause effects to historic properties. The antennas would be added to an existing array in an established substation and ground disturbance would be hand-digging of previously-disturbed ground.		
2. **Geology and Soils**	☑	☐
Explanation: All work would be inside the fenced substation yard. The five hand-excavated pits for spot-welding to the grounding mats would extend 18 inches through the graveled yard surface and the previously disturbed soil and fill of the yard.		
3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)	☑	☐
Explanation: All travel would be on established access roads and all work would occur inside the denuded, fenced station yard. No plants, including special-status species, would be affected.		
4. **Wildlife** (including federal/state special-status species and habitats)	☑	☐
Explanation: No impacts to wildlife, including special-status species, would be expected with the project. The level of activity and noise would not rise above typical maintenance projects at the site, so wildlife in the vicinity should not be disturbed more than occurs during routine operation.		
5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish** (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)	☑	☐
Explanation: The project would be located in the developed substation footprint that is situated on a dry plateau with only intermittent streams nearby. Also, ground-disturbing work would be taking place before the onset of the typical wet season.		

6.	**Wetlands**	☑	☐
	Explanation: There are no wetlands in the project's zone of potential impact.		
7.	**Groundwater and Aquifers**	☑	☐
	Explanation: The hand-excavation would not extend past the 18 inches needed to access the grounding mat and therefore, would have no potential to impact groundwater or aquifers.		
8.	**Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**	☑	☐
	Explanation: Since the substation has been in operation since 1975, there would be no impact to land use or specially designated areas of the Nez Perce Tribal Reservation. The plateau on which the station is situated also hosts associated interconnected transmission line facilities.		
9.	**Visual Quality**	☑	☐
	Explanation: The two rod antennas would not add substantially to the overall tower presence in the viewshed. At only three inches in diameter, they would diminish in visibility rather quickly moving away from the tower. Key scenic views or culturally-sensitive areas in the vicinity would be far enough removed to incur no impact from the change. Removal of the parabolic dish would also have no impact due to its low position at around 20 feet above ground.		
10.	**Air Quality**	☑	☐
	Explanation: There would be no impact to air quality aside from limited duration vehicle exhaust during work access and egress along established routes.		
11.	**Noise**	☑	☐
	Explanation: There would be temporary increases in localized noise around work activities taking place in the control house and in the substation yard. It would be expected that noise levels would remain within the normal range for activities that would be manual in nature.		
12.	**Human Health and Safety**	☑	☐
	Explanation: Public health and safety would not be impacted from the work that would be localized to restricted substation grounds. Health and safety of construction personnel would not be adversely impacted as OSHA or BPA safety guidelines would be followed. BPA employee safety during subsequent regional field operations should benefit from the project through better coverage and reliability of the two-way radio communication network.		

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, if necessary:

☑ Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.

Explanation, if necessary:

☑ 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, if necessary:

☑ 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, if necessary:

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: The Hatwai Substation is on BPA fee-owned land inside the Nez Perce Tribal Reservation. Because the work is limited to manual work in the fenced, previously-disturbed station grounds it would not require special coordination or notification.

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

Signed: *__/s/ Michael O'Connell_____* Date: *___August 28, 2017____*
Michael J. O'Connell ECT-4