

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Airport-Cottonwood 230-kV Tower 9-4 Off-ROW Tree Removal

**Project No.:** 100153025

**Project Manager:** Ricardo Valerde

**Location:** Shasta County, California

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine maintenance

## **Description of the Proposed Action:**

Western Area Power Administration, Sierra Nevada Region (WAPA) is responsible for the operation and maintenance of several federally owned and operated transmission lines throughout California, including the Airport-Cottonwood 230-kV line (AIR-CW), located in Shasta County. Part of this responsibility includes ensuring WAPA maintains reliable access to transmission towers and other facilities to comply with the National Electric Safety Code, Western States Coordinating Council, and WAPA directives for protecting human safety and maintaining the reliable operation of the transmission system.

WAPA proposes to remove one Gray Pine tree on the west side of the AIR-CW line near tower 9/4. The hazard tree is located outside but adjacent to the right-of-way (off-ROW) and has the potential to fall on, grow into, or otherwise compromise the integrity of the transmission lines. WAPA Order 450.3A dictates the removal of hazard trees in compliance with the North American Electric Reliability Council (NERC) Standard FAC-003-1. WAPA has limited discretion on the removal of trees that meet hazard standards. Debris will be chipped and broadcast. Larger wood will be cut into 1-4 foot lengths and stacked/piled in ROW. The cut stump will be treated per WAPA's herbicide recommendations.

**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), WAPA 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, WAPA finds that the proposed action is categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

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Attachment: 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

The proposed project area is in Shasta County, California on an undeveloped parcel adjacent to the ROW.

The dominant vegetation type is annual grassland. The site is located within the Churn Creek Bottom geographic feature and is adjacent to one of the Churn Creek channels and associated riparian area and wetlands.

Equipment staging areas would be on roads and within the ROW whenever possible.

## Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

<b>Environmental Resource Impacts</b>	<b>No Potential for Significance</b>	<b>No Potential for Significance, with Conditions</b>
<b>1. Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Explanation:**

Tree removal will not cause significant ground disturbance. The O&M activities and vegetation management at these sites would not impact cultural resources. WAPA Environment staff will be contacted immediately if archeological, paleontological, or historic evidence is found.

2. **Geology and Soils**



**Explanation:**

Ground disturbance is not anticipated in this project; therefore, no impacts would occur.

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



**Explanation:**

There is potential for the site to support the Federally threatened Slender Orcutt grass (*Orcuttia tenuis*) and California rare plant, Red Bluff dwarf rush (*Juncus leiospermus* var. *leiospermus*), associated with vernal pool habitat in this region. The plants have a combined bloom season ranging from March-October.

Botanical surveys were conducted on June 4, 2021 and determined these species are not present at the site.

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



**Explanation:**

Elderberry shrubs, host to the Federally-protected valley elderberry longhorn beetle and protected migratory bird nests may be located in the vicinity of removal operations.

A biological survey conducted on June 4, 2021 determined there were no elderberry shrubs or migratory bird nests in the project area. No other federal/state special status species and/or habitats were identified during the survey.

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



**Explanation:**

The project area is on east side of a Churn Creek channel. Within 100-feet of the creek, vehicles will be limited to existing access roads, mixing of herbicides and open petroleum products will be prohibited, only manual clearing of vegetation will be permitted, and herbicide application will be limited to direct application. Equipment will be stored and fueled a maximum distance from the creek and vehicles will be inspected daily for leaks.

6. **Wetlands**  
**Explanation:**



A biological survey conducted on June 4, 2021 determined there are no wetlands in the vicinity of the project area.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**  
**Explanation:**



The project would not provide a pathway for groundwater contamination. Spill prevention measures would be utilized during construction activities.

8. **Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas**  
**Explanation:**



The land use would not change at the project site. Nor is the project within, or near, any specially designated areas, such as National Scenic Rivers. There are no landowner restrictions.

9. **Visual Quality**  
**Explanation:**



The visual quality would be consistent with the existing use of the transmission right-of-way corridor. There would be no significant change to the visual quality.

10. **Air Quality**  
**Explanation:**



A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions would occur during tree removal; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after construction.

WAPA has adopted the following procedures to support the California state implementation plan to restore air quality in the region. The contractor is expected to adopt the procedures during the project.

AQ-SOP-1: The Contractor will adhere to all applicable requirements of those agencies having jurisdiction over air quality matters, and any necessary permits for O&M will be obtained.

AQ-SOP-2: Machinery and vehicles will be kept in good operating condition and older equipment will be replaced with equipment meeting applicable emission standards; appropriate emissions-control equipment will be maintained for vehicles and equipment, per EPA and/or WAPA air-emission requirements.

AQ-SOP-3: Idle equipment will be shut down when not in active use; visible emissions from stationary generators will be controlled.

AQ-SOP-4: Dust – control measures will be implemented in road construction and maintenance, as needed.

Trucks transporting loose material will be covered or maintain at least two feet of freeboard and will not create any visible dust emissions.

AQ-SOP-5: There will be no open burning of construction trash.

AQ-SOP-6: Grading activities will cease during periods of high winds (as determined by local air quality management districts).

AQ-SOP-7: Major operations will be avoided on days when the local Air Quality Index is expected to exceed 150.

11. **Noise**



**Explanation:**

No residences are within the immediate vicinity of the project location. Tree removal construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change.

12. **Human Health and Safety**



**Explanation:**

During project activities, all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or safety. Contractor shall be required to follow the OSHA standards set forth in 29 CFR 1910.269 specifically paragraphs (a)(2), (b), (c), (g), (k), (p), and (r) as required under (a)(E)(2), line clearance tree trimming operations performed by line -clearance tree trimmers who are not qualified employees. Contractor shall also adhere to the requirements under Title 8 Cal OSHA Electrical Safety Order specifically Subchapter 5 Article 38 and Subchapter 7 Article 12. Contractor shall maintain a safe working distance from conductors as described in the above OSHA standards. If a safe working distance cannot be maintained, a clearance shall be requested 3 days in advance.

**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:** WAPA would work closely with the landowners to provide adequate notification of construction timing. No restrictions were identified.

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

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