Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: MREDI – Del Rio and Tunk VHF Radio Upgrades (update to previous categorical exclusion issued August 26, 2021)

Project Manager: Ben Younce, TEPF-CSB-2

Location: Douglas and Okanogan Counties, Washington

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 upgrade its VHF radio system at two sites in its Grand Coulee Radio Region. The upgrades would include the addition of equipment, replacement of antennas, and removal of a limited amount of trees at BPA's existing Del Rio and Tunk Radio Station sites. The project would help replace BPA's aging VHF radio system with a simple, modern radio system with improved voice coverage for remote field personnel. This CX is an updated to the CX signed on August 26, 2021 to reflect a change in the number of trees proposed to be removed at the Tunk Mountain Radio Station.

At the existing **Del Rio Radio Station**, BPA would install new equipment, including two equipment racks with ground bars, fuse panels, isolation kits, term server and VHF (very high frequency) router and repeater equipment, inside the existing equipment building at the site. A new ground bar would also be installed inside the building. The existing microwave radio equipment would be retired. A new 8-foot-diameter antenna would be installed on the existing 90-foot-tall lattice tower on the south side of the equipment building. The existing waveguide would be removed and replaced with a new waveguide, connecting the new antenna to equipment inside the equipment building. An existing 30-foot-tall monopole on the east side of the building would be removed, along with the associated microwave antenna and waveguide.

At the existing **Tunk Mountain Radio Station**, BPA would remove and replace equipment in the existing equipment building, including a VHF router, term server and fuse panel. A new ground bar would be installed inside the building, along with a wall mounted dehydrator. An existing 8-foot-tall UHF (ultra high frequency) radio antenna would be removed from the existing 60-foot-tall lattice tower at the site and replaced with a new 8-foot-diameter microwave antenna. The current waveguide connecting the antenna to indoor equipment, would be removed and replaced. Additionally, seventeen Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) trees, located approximately 450 feet south of the tower location, would be removed to prevent future interference to the beam path. These trees are an average diameter of 13.6-inches and 32.6-feet-tall.

Fall protection systems would be installed on both towers to increase safety for tower maintenance workers. This system would include installation of an anchor support beam near the top of the structure, along with a series of brackets, approximately ten feet apart, with a top and bottom anchor.

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/ Beth Belanger
Beth Belanger
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC

Reviewed by:

/s/ Carol Leiter
Carol Leiter
Supervisory Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Katey C. Grange *September 2, 2021*
Katey C. Grange Date
NEPA Compliance Officer

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.

Proposed Action: MREDI – Del Rio and Tunk Radio Upgrades (update to previous categorical exclusion issued on August 26, 2021)

Project Site Description

The sites are in Douglas and Okanogan Counties in Washington at existing radio tower facilities.

The Del Rio Radio Station is approximately ten miles northwest of Grand Coulee, Washington. It is in Section 32, Township 29 North, Range 29 East. The 0.5-acre parcel is graveled and surrounded by cultivated agricultural land. Highway 174 borders the northern side of the parcel. Scattered ponds are in the project vicinity, with the nearest being approximately 275-feet north of the site. The radio station is approximately 2,575 feet in elevation.

The Tunk Radio Station is in the Colville National Forest, approximately fifteen miles northeast of Omak, Washington. It is in Section 8, Township 35 North, Range 29 East. The site is surrounded by a Douglas fir dominated forest. The ground in the project area consists of fragmented bedrock, with various bunchgrasses and forbs. There are no water bodies in the vicinity. The radio station is approximately 5,500 feet in elevation.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA Cultural staff reviewed the work proposed at the Del Rio Radio Station and determined that although the radio station was constructed in 1953, it is not considered eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. There is no ground disturbance outside of the radio station fence; therefore BPA cultural staff have determined that the work at the Del Rio Radio Station would have no potential to effect historic resources.

For the work at the Tunk Radio Station, BPA intiated Section 106 consultation on August 20, 2020, with the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, US Forest Service (USFS)—Colville National Forest, and Washington Department of Historic Preservation (DAHP). On the same day, DAHP and the Colville Tribe concurred with the proposed Area of Potential Effect (APE). The Colville Tribe noted concerns about nearby resources and potential rock features. BPA coordinated with the USFS to determine that BPA would be acting as the lead federal agency for this undertaking. A pedestrian survey of the entire APE was conducted and no cultural resources were found. As a result of the survey, BPA determined that no historic properties would be affected by the project. On July 22, 2021, BPA sent the consulting parties the cultural survey report, along with the determination

letters. On July 26, 2021, DAHP concurred with BPA's determination. To date, no responses have been received from the USFS or the Colville Tribe.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance is proposed at the Del Rio site. At Tunk, ground disturbance would be limited to tree removal. The tree stumps would be left intact onsite. Best management practices would be implemented to control erosion. There would be no impacts to geology or soils.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The Del Rio Radio Station is graveled and devoid of plants; therefore there would be no impacts to plants at this project location. Some vegetation may be crushed during the antenna replacement activities at the Tunk Mountain Radio Station; however there are no special-status plants that would be impacted by the project. The district botanist for the Tonasket Ranger District, provided a botany biological evaluation of the site and noted there are no threatened, endangered, proposed or sensitive plants at the project location and that the small amount of tree removal would be inconsequential.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: There are no Federal/state special-status species or habitats at the Del Rio site that would be impacted by the project. BPA and the district wildlife biologist for the Tonasket Ranger District, reviewed potential impacts to endangered, threatened, proposed and USFS sensitive species and determined that the proposed work at the Tunk Radio Station may cause short-term disturbance and could result in temporary displacement of endangered and USFS sensitive species. The Tunk Radio Station is located in a Lynx Analysis Unit (LAU) on National Forest Service lands. Lynx are not currently known to occupy the LAU and potential for lynx to be present or moving through the area is low. Project activities would occur for a limited duration and are unlikely to impact lynx. There would be no effect to other ESA-listed species. Some USFS sensitive species may experience temporary impacts from the proposed project; however, the effects would be considered insignificant and the potential impacts would not result in a negative trend toward federal listing for USFS sensitive species or loss of viability.

Notes:

- Tree removal would occur after August 15, to minimize impacts to nesting migratory birds.
- If any active nests are found on the structures prior to construction, the construction would be delayed until the nests are unoccupied.

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 habitats in, or near, either site that would be affected by project activities. The USFS fish biologist from the Tonasket District reviewed the project and determined that the nearest stream is over 0.5 miles away and there would be no effects to aquatic resourcese, including endangered fish species.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands at either location that would be impacted by the project.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Minor ground disturbance may occur during the felling of trees at the Tunk Radio Station; however, there are no planned ground excavation activities at either site; therefore, there would be no impact to groundwater or aquifers.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The land use would not change at either locations. There are no specially-designated areas near the project locations.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The visual quality would be unchanged and would remain consistent with the existing use of the radio station sites.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A small amount of dust and vehicle emissions may occur during construction; however, there would be no significant changes to air quality during or after the projects occur.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Construction noise would be temporary and would occur during daylight hours. Operational noise would not change.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During project activities all standard safety protocols would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or safety. The installation of fall protection systems on the towers, would increase worker safety overall.

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: Both sites are in remote locations. Neither site has neighbors in close proximity; therefore, landowner notification and coordination would not be required.

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

Signed: */s/ Beth Belanger* *September 2, 2021*

Beth Belanger – ECT-4 Date
Contract Environmental Protection Specialist
Flux Resources, LLC