

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION DETERMINATION**

**Rocky Mountain Region, Western Area Power Administration**

**Archer-Stegall 230-kV Fiber Optic Ground Wire Addition**

**Laramie and Goshen Counties, Wyoming**

**Banner and Scotts Bluff Counties, Nebraska**

- A. Brief Description of Proposal:** Western Area Power Administration (Western) and Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, Inc. (Tri-State), propose to install a fiber optic ground wire (OPGW) on Western's existing Archer-Stegall 230-kV Transmission Line between Archer and Stegall Substations. The Transmission Line is located in Laramie and Goshen Counties, Wyoming and Banner and Scotts Bluff Counties, Nebraska. This effort is part of Western's ongoing program to update and improve its communications system. The OPGW will replace the existing west side overhead ground wire (OGW) on 61 miles of the Archer-Stegall 230-kV Transmission Line. Termination of the OPGW will be required at the Round Top Communication site and the Archer and Stegall Substations.

Splice boxes or "pulling sites" would be located at the Round Top Communication sites and the Archer and Stegall Substations. Additional "pulling sites" depend on the cable reel or spool length and "pulling sites" would be determined and communicated by the construction contractor, after contract award, and would be located on the existing right-of-way (ROW) easement.

The new cable would not be visibly different from the existing OGW. The project would not change the size of the ROW or the way it is maintained. Spool trucks are used to pull, wind, and remove the old cable and then feed, tighten, and secure the new suspended cable. In addition, a splicing truck, boom (cherry picker) bucket truck, and a cable spool container truck will be used. Existing access roads would be used, no grading or construction of new access roads will occur. Ground disturbance would be limited to that associated with utility trucks operating at the "pull sites."

A small cable trench will be installed to accommodate a four-conduit duct bank between the Archer control building and Archer Communication Site. Trenching and boring will also be done from structure 3/6 of the Archer-Cheyenne 115-kV Transmission Line to the Cheyenne Maintenance Facility and from structure 27/2 of the Archer-Stegall 230-kV line to the Round Top Communication Site. In addition, the project will also extend the existing conduit at structure 70/5 of the Archer-Stegall 115-kV line to structure 61/2 of the Archer-Stegall 230-kV line.

Work is scheduled to begin in January 2014.

- 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.

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

- 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; and
  - 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 for one year after the signature date. If construction has not commenced within that time, Western’s Environmental Division must be contacted for an updated environmental review prior to construction.

The contractor shall limit the movement of its crews and equipment to the ROW, including access routes. The contractor shall limit movement on the ROW to minimize damage to grazing land, crops, or property, and shall avoid unnecessary land disturbance.

No disturbance of vegetation will occur within 100 meters of a stream. No fueling, pulling sites, staging or storage areas would be placed within 100 meters of wetlands, streams or riparian areas. Where possible, vehicles should avoid crossing extremely wet (hydric) soils.

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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).

To minimize impacts to the environment and prevent damage to access roads, operation of off-road equipment will not be permitted during periods of heavy rains, when soils are wet, or when excessive soil damage may occur due to unsuitable operating conditions. No construction or maintenance activities shall be performed during periods when the soil is too wet to adequately support construction equipment. If equipment creates ruts in excess of 6-inches deep, the soil shall be deemed too wet to adequately support construction equipment.

Western would implement standard best management practices for erosion, seeding, and noxious weed control. All equipment used will be cleaned prior to use in the area to prevent transporting of invasive plant or noxious weed seeds.

To comply with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, if the work is to be done during the general nesting season which is typically March 1 through July 31, the maintenance crew will consult with Western Environment to ensure that there are no nests in the project vicinity. Work conducted during the general nesting season will require a field biologist to survey areas in advance of the work crews. Western Environment will provide the field biologist services.

Western shall exercise care to preserve the natural landscape and shall conduct this construction operation to prevent any unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the project vicinity. Except where clearing is required for permanent works, approved construction roads, or excavation operations, vegetation shall be preserved and shall be protected from damage by Western's construction operations and equipment.

The contractor shall not use any earth moving, blading, or tracked equipment for action covered by this CX. All equipment used shall be rubber-tired. If road improvements or staging areas are necessary, the contractor shall submit a detailed description of the improvements to Western for environmental review and approval 60-days prior to construction.

The contractor is responsible for determining all pulling and splicing locations. If the contractor wishes to use pulling locations or staging areas that are outside of Western's ROW, then the contractor shall allow Western a minimum of 60-days after receipt of the proposed site, to review and environmentally clear the area.

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**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.

  
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Signature

**Date:** 8/19/13

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

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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

<b>Application of Categorical Exclusions (1021.410)</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Unknown</b>
(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. Extraordinary circumstances are unique situations presented by specific proposals, 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>B. Conditions that are Integral Elements of the Classes of Actions in Appendix B.</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		

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<p>(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, 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:</p>	X		
<p>(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;</p>	X		
<p>(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);</p>	X		
<p>(iii) Floodplains and wetlands (as defined in 10 CFR 1022.4, — Compliance with Floodplain and Wetland Environmental Review Requirements: “Definitions,” or its successor);</p>	X		
<p>(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;</p>	X		
<p>(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;</p>	X		

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(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		
(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		