

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Western Area Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: NCPA Fulton 230-kV Transmission Line Structures Repair

Project No.: N/A

Project Manager: Steve Tuggle

Location: Northern Sonoma County, California

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

Description of the Proposed Action:

Northern California Power Agency (NCPA), a customer of Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), has requested that WAPA's line crew perform maintenance on several transmission towers on their Fulton 230-kV line to ensure continued integrity of their line. Work will consist of replacing various hardware including vibration dampers, shackles, insulator bells, jumper rods, and switches and will be completed at NCPA's expense. Work is planned to occur on five structures and will be completed primarily through use of a helicopter. Crews will access the project sites via established access roads. The helicopter landing site, located near NCPA's power plant, is a previously disturbed gravel turnaround which is routinely used as a helipad.

Findings:

WAPA follows the regulations at 40 C.F.R. Parts 1500-1508, in addition to the Department of Energy's (DOE) regulations implementing National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) at 10 C.F.R. Part 1021 to meet the agency's obligations under NEPA, 42 U.S.C. §§ 4321 et seq. In accordance with Section 1021.410(b) DOE's 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.

Signed:

Name: Kristen Dalldorf

Title: Environmental Manager

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 project occurs within a remote part of the Coast Range of California on Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land. The terrain in the project area is steep and rugged, with dense chaparral and pine vegetation. Access roads are well-established but winding. The transmission line right-of-way is maintained in a state of greatly reduced vegetation density. The areas selected for landing zones and staging area are established gravel or paved areas.

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:

Through past and a current 2024 survey report, no known archaeological resources are within the proposed area of potential effect (APE). This project would have no adverse effect to historic properties.

2. Geology and Soils

Explanation:

The project does not involve any soil disturbance.

3. Plants

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

Explanation:

WAPA biologists performed a desktop review of the project, including examination of botany reports from the BLM. Since the work to be performed is by helicopter, on the towers, in heavily disturbed right-of-ways, and with the landing zone sited in a developed area, no impacts to sensitive plants are anticipated.

4. Wildlife

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

Explanation:

WAPA biologists performed a desktop review of the project, including review of a habitat survey report completed in 2024 for NCPA's lease renewal. Since the work to be performed is by helicopter, on the towers, in heavily disturbed right-of-ways, and with the landing zone sited in a developed area, no impacts to sensitive wildlife are anticipated.

5. Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish

(including Federal/state special-status species, ESUs, and habitats)

Explanation:

This project occurs in upland areas, with only an artificial retention pond occurring near the landing zone. Refueling operations will occur the maximum distance from waters and will include secondary containment measures to contain accidental spills.

6. Wetlands

Explanation:

This project occurs in upland areas. No wetlands are known in the project area.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Explanation:

The project area does not include any typical pathways that would allow groundwater or aquifer alteration or contamination.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Explanation:

This project occurs in established utility right-of-ways and will not result in any changes in land use.

9. Visual Quality

Explanation:

The helicopter may be visible to some people while it is in flight. However, this use is both short in duration and consistent with routine patrols and maintenance of a utility right-of-way.

10. Air Quality

Explanation:

Air quality emissions would be from short-term helicopter use and exhaust from worker's vehicles. The Project would be exempt from federal General Conformity Analysis and Determination because project emissions do not exceed de minimis levels for O&M activities, including helicopter emissions. Project emissions would not exceed local air quality district standards. WAPA would follow its standard operating 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.

AQ-SOP-8: Include dust-control measures such as water or chemical suppressants.

AQ-SOP-9: Re-seeding of ground surfaces that have been significantly disturbed to prevent wind dispersion of soil.

AQ-SOP-10: Regular watering of exposed soils and unpaved access roads during maintenance activities.

AQ-SOP-11: Use reasonably practicable methods and devices to control, prevent, and otherwise minimize atmospheric emissions or discharges of air contaminants.

11. Noise

Explanation:

The project occurs in a remote area with little visitor access. While the helicopter may be audible to some people while it is in flight, its use is both short in duration and consistent with routine maintenance of a utility right-of-way.

12. Human Health and Safety

Explanation:

During project activities, all standard safety protocols and OSHA regulations would be followed. Project activities would not impact human health or safety.

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:

None provided

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:

None provided

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:

None provided

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:

None provided

Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description:

WAPA will work closely with the landowners to provide adequate notification of project activities.

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

Signed:

Name: Kristen Dalldorf

Title: Environmental Manager