



**Western Area Power Administration
Desert Southwest Region
Categorical Exclusion Determination Form**

Proposed Action Title: Blanket CX for Routine Vegetation Management Activities

Location: Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah

Expiration Date: December 31, 2029

A. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION:

The Western Area Power Administration (WAPA), Desert Southwest Region (DSW), conducts routine vegetation management activities on existing transmission lines, substations, communications sites, and storage yards in four states (Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah). These maintenance activities are part of the day-to-day operation of WAPA's infrastructure.

The following activities occurring within DSW's existing deeded properties, easements, and on DSW's documented access roads are covered by this Categorical Exclusion (CX):

- (1) Pre- and post-work monitoring;
- (2) Trimming and removal of danger trees, slash, and other incompatible vegetation using hand tools (e.g. chainsaws) where no brush piling and no off-road vehicular access are required;
- (3) Application of herbicides and pesticides (where applicable);
- (4) Salvage and relocation of native plants, including saguaros;
- (5) Other closely related activities that have little or no environmental or cultural resource impacts or regulated materials concerns as determined by DSW's Environmental Department (G9400) (requires submission of a Project Initiation Form [PIF] per Stipulation B.2).

B. STIPULATIONS PERTAINING TO PROPOSAL:

- 1) Activities listed in Section A, Items 1 through 4, that will adhere to all Stipulations in

Section B do not require submission of a PIF to G9400.

- 2) Activities listed in Section A, Items 1 through 4, that will not adhere to all Stipulations in Section B, and other closely related activities (Section A, Item 5), require submission of a PIF to G9400. Upon review, G9400 may approve coverage of these activities under this CX or prepare an activity-specific CX as needed.
- 3) This CX is valid until December 31, 2029, or until an updated version is executed by G9400, whichever comes first.

Biological Stipulations:

- 4) Careful inspections, of vegetation by qualified personnel, must be completed for active avian nests prior to any vegetation management activities during the nesting season, between February 15 and August 31. Vegetation must be inspected no more than seven (7) calendar days in advance of vegetation management activities during this time period. Where possible, avian surveys in support of vegetation removal activities will be conducted by G9400 or their contracted biologists. However, avian surveys for work that is incidental, urgent, or where a scheduling conflict may exist may be completed by the Vegetation Program Manager, if they are a qualified biologist. If an active avian nest is found in vegetation that needs to be trimmed or removed, vegetation management activities within 40 feet must be delayed until the nest is no longer active (Exceptions, see Item 7). A nest becomes active when the first egg is laid and remains active until fledged young are no longer dependent on the nest. Nests that are empty, contain non-viable eggs, or are being built but do not yet have an egg in them are considered inactive
- 5) Mexican Spotted Owl – G9400 will be contacted, two weeks, prior to any work within nesting season at Mt. Lemmon, Towers Mountain or Elgin Mountain communications sites, or along the Flagstaff-Pinnacle Peak transmission lines between miles 144 and 174.
- 6) Any injured or orphaned birds and all observed active nests must be immediately reported to G9400. Any dead birds must be reported to G9400 within twenty-four (24) hours of discovery. Additional documentation, such as photographs and GPS coordinates, may be requested to support DSW's reporting requirements to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife



Service.

- 7) If vegetation removal that will result in take of an active migratory bird nest is deemed necessary by the DSW Vegetation Program Manager, under WAPA's Special Purpose Utility Permit (SPUT), then G9400 or WAPA's General Biologist will be consulted. Compliance with the SPUT will be established prior to the occurrence where possible or reported after the occurrence if hazardous conditions necessitate immediate corrective action. Hazardous conditions include but are not limited to A) vegetation (dead or alive) encroaching within the Minimum Approach Distance for Non-Electrical workers (MAD-NE), or B) vegetation (dead or alive) that is within or has the potential to fall through the Minimum Vegetation Clearance Distance (MVCD).
- 8) Saguaros – These plants are a species of special interest and may only be relocated or removed with prior approval from the G9000 manager. After prior approval, relocation of saguaros under all conditions, as well as removal of saguaros with a measured clearance within 5 feet of the Minimum Vegetation Clearance Distance (MVCD), or posing a significant threat to DSW's infrastructure, as determined by the Vegetation Program Manager, are covered activities under this CX. All other saguaro removals are considered closely related activities, requiring submittal of a PIF, per Section B, Item 2.
- 9) Pesticide applicators must meet all state licensing requirements and must follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines. Applicators must use only EPA-registered pesticides that are approved for the intended use and location and must follow all applicable label directions.
- 10) IVM shall determine whether a proposed action would be located within a wetland consistent with the most authoritative information available relative to site conditions from available sources, as appropriate, then G9400 or WAPA's General Biologist will be consulted.

Cultural Stipulations:

- 11) Before work commences, G9400 staff will utilize WAPA GIS resources to determine presence of any previously identified cultural sites. If work covered under this CX is to



be completed within a known site boundary, G9400 will provide appropriate avoidance measures to be utilized within the boundaries of said known sites.

12) If any cultural resources are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the proposed action, work within 100 feet of the discovery area must halt immediately, and the G9400 Archaeologist must be contacted immediately. Work around the discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by G9400.

13) If any possible human remains are inadvertently discovered during implementation of the proposed action, work within 100 feet of the discovery area must halt immediately, and the G9400 Archaeologist must be notified immediately (no later than 24 hours from the time of discovery). A reasonable effort must be made to protect the remains from looting and/or further damage. Work around the discovery must not resume until notification to proceed is provided by G9400.

C. NUMBER AND TITLE OF THE CATEGORICAL EXCLUSION BEING APPLIED:

(See text in 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D.) B1.3 Routine maintenance

D. REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS 10 CFR 1021.410 (b): (See full text in regulation)

☐ The proposed action fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix A or B of 10 CFR 1021.

To fit within the classes of actions listed in Appendix B, a proposal must be one that would not:

(1) threaten a violation of applicable statutory, regulatory, or permit requirements for environment, safety, and health, or similar requirements of the Department of Energy (DOE) or Executive Orders;

(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; (3) disturb hazardous substances; pollutants; contaminants; or Comprehensive Environmental Response,



Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA)-excluded petroleum and natural gas products that preexist in the environment such that there would be uncontrolled or unpermitted releases; (4) have the potential to cause significant impacts on environmentally sensitive resources, including, but not limited to, those listed in paragraph B(4) of 10 CFR 1021, Subpart D, Appendix B; (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.

- ☐ There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal.
- ☐ The proposal has not been improperly segmented, and 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.

E. DETERMINATION:

Based on my review of information conveyed to me and in my possession (or attached) concerning the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer (as authorized under DOE Order 451.1B), I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other regulatory requirements set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

NATALIE Digitally signed by
NATALIE ORTEGA
Date: 2025.02.25
13:37:07 -07'00'

Signature and Date

Natalie N. Ortega

NEPA Compliance Officer

