



U.S. Department of Energy Categorical Exclusion Determination Form

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| <u>Categorical Exclusion Number:</u> | CX-270876 |
| <u>Loan Application Number:</u> | EIR0044 |
| <u>Proposed Action Title:</u> | North Mobile – Crichton Underground Fiber Optics Project |
| <u>Program of Field Office:</u> | Loan Programs Office |
| <u>Location(s) (City/County/State):</u> | Mobile, Alabama (Mobile County) |

Proposed Action Description:

Description of Categorically Excluded Action

The United States Department of Energy (DOE), Loan Programs Office (LPO), may provide loan guarantees for energy infrastructure projects under Section 1706 of Title XVII of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, as amended by the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 (42 U.S.C. 16517) and the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 72 (July 4, 2025)) (the Energy Dominance Financing or EDF Program). The purpose of the EDF Program is to finance projects and facilities in the U.S. that retool, repower, repurpose, or replace energy infrastructure that has ceased operations or enable operating energy infrastructure to increase capacity or output (42 U.S.C. 16517(a)(2) and Pub. L. No. 119-21, 139 Stat. 72 (July 4, 2025)).

LPO is considering whether to issue a loan guarantee of a funding facility to Alabama Power Company (APC) pursuant to its authority under the EDF Program. In its application, APC has identified the North Mobile – Crichton Underground Fiber Optics Project (Project) for inclusion in the funding facility that is the subject of DOE’s loan guarantee. APC may request inclusion of multiple individual projects with independent utility in the funding facility that is the subject of the DOE loan guarantee; accordingly, DOE will complete an environmental review pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for these projects prior to their inclusion in the funding facility that is the subject of DOE’s loan guarantee.

The Project includes installing approximately 4.4 miles of fiber. The Project will enhance system operational flexibility that will facilitate the planned fleet transition. The proposed activity will enhance incremental transmission capacity, high-speed communication paths (Fiber), and system automation.

Project Description

DOE’s Proposed Action is the issuance of a proposed Federal loan guarantee to the APC for the Project, which includes the proposed installation of approximately 4.4 miles of fiber optic cable within an existing 200-foot-wide transmission line right-of-way. The Project will run parallel to the existing transmission line system between the North Mobile TS and the Crichton DS in Mobile, Alabama. The existing ROW traverses residential and light industrial areas, woodlands, wetlands, and riverine and stream crossings. The existing ROW has been cleared of vegetation and periodically maintained; no additional vegetation clearing is anticipated (other than for trenching/plowing methods discussed below).

The installation of fiber optic cable will consist predominately of directional boring/HDD to avoid surface disturbance at road and wetland crossings. Approximately 60% of the route will be installed using direction boring. Fiber optic cables will be installed at 4-foot depths and connected to substations via splicing or pulling stations, accessible by handholes. In locations where HDD is not possible, trenching/plowing techniques will be used (up to 40% of the route). This method involves excavating land for open cut trenches at approximately 150- to 600-foot intervals along the 4.4-mile route, 4x4 feet wide. The open cut trenches will be filled with previously excavated backfill material. ROW monuments will be added to prevent future damage to the cable. Additional monuments and markers may be placed, as needed, along the existing line (c.g., splice locations) during installation. Construction laydown areas will be located within the established ROWs. Additional infrastructure, such as access roads or off-site parking areas, is not required for this project.



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Construction is scheduled to begin January 2026 and is anticipated to be completed by December 2026.

In accordance with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act, LPO's review of the Project found that there would be no effect to designated critical habitat. Additionally, for six (7) Federally threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species with potential to occur in the Project area (tricolored bat, alligator snapping turtle, black pinesnake, eastern indigo snake, gopher tortoise, gulf sturgeon, and monarch butterfly). LPO has reached a *no effect* determination based on 1) primarily underground construction/installation, 2) no in-water or in-stream work proposed, and 4) the results of desktop and field-based assessments indicating no ground disturbance within suitable habitat areas for these species.

In accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), LPO consulted with the Alabama State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). On October 20, 2025, the Alabama SHPO concurred with LPO's finding of no historic properties affected for this project. DOE identified and contacted seven federally recognized Native American Indian Tribes (Tribes) that may have an interest in the Project area (Alabama-Coushatta Tribe of Texas; Alabama-Quassarte Tribal Town; Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma; Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana; Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians; Muscogee (Creek) Nation; and Seminole Tribe of Florida). The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma provided comments that are reflected herein.

In the event that ground-disturbing work uncovers significant archaeological materials, such as stone arrowheads, ceramics, or early building foundations, or if work uncovers human burials or human remains, ground disturbing activities will immediately be stopped within a 300-foot radius and the materials will be protected. The SHPO and tribes, including the Choctaw Nation Historic Preservation Department, will be contacted as soon as possible and given an opportunity to provide input before construction resumes. Additionally, if any archaeological or cultural materials are discovered during the project undertaking, neither the construction team nor the applicant will disclose this information to the public or the media in any manner, including social media. Discoveries of archaeological and historic materials will be kept private and confidential.

If human remains are encountered during construction, the provisions of the Alabama Burial Act (*Code of Alabama* 1975 §13A-7-23.1, as amended; Alabama Historical Commission Administrative Code Chapter 460-X-10 Burials) would be followed. This stipulation will be included in construction plans.

New handhole and monument placement will meet local and federal floodplain management requirements. Work areas will be temporary and will not require modifications to site elevations. Temporary erosion controls will be installed and maintained until the work areas are restored and stabilized. Base flood elevations will not be affected by the Project.



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Categorical Exclusion(s) Applied:

B4.7 - Fiber optic cable

Categorical Exclusion(s) Description:

The Project is consistent with and covered by DOE categorical exclusions in 10 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1021, Appendix B4, Categorical Exclusions Applicable to Electric Power and Transmission. Specifically, the Project is covered by DOE Categorical Exclusion:

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.

Per 10 CFR 1021.102, application of categorical exclusions (classes of actions that normally do not require EAs or EISs), the following clarifications are provided to assist in the appropriate application of categorical exclusions that employ the term or phrase “previously disturbed or developed”:

- (1) *“Previously disturbed or developed” refers to land that has been changed such that its functioning ecological processes have been and remain altered by human activity. The phrase encompasses areas that have been transformed from natural cover to nonnative species or a managed state, including, but not limited to, utility and electric power transmission corridors and rights-of-way, and other areas where active utilities and currently used roads are readily available.*

Regulatory Requirements Defined in 10 CFR § 1021

The proposed loan guarantee for actions described above was subjected to an environmental due diligence review by DOE LPO staff to ensure consistency with the specific category of action (categorical exclusion) contained in Appendix B of 10 CFR Part 1021 and the conditions for applying categorical exclusions specified in Section 102 of Part 1021. To ensure that the requirements of Appendix B were met, LPO Environmental Compliance obtained numerous project-related documents between March and October 2025 and participated in several conference calls with APC staff to ensure a complete understanding of the activities associated with the Project.

The environmental due diligence review determined that there is no controversy regarding the potential environmental impacts of the Project, and that the actions associated with the loan guarantee would not adversely affect any physical, biological, or socio-cultural resources associated with the deployment of the project. The environmental due diligence review determined the Proposed Action has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Signature by APC’s designated representative in the Corporate Validation section (below) is an indication of APC’s concurrence with the findings and determinations presented herein.



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For the DOE procedures regarding categorical exclusions, including the full text of each categorical exclusion, see [10 CFR 1021.102](#) and Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021, and also Section 5.4 (Applying one or more categorical exclusions to a proposal) and Appendices B and C of [DOE's National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures](#) (June 30, 2025). **Requirements and guidance in 10 CFR 1021.102 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures:** (See full text in regulation and in Implementing Procedures)

- The proposal fits within a class of actions that is listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021 or Appendix B and C of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures (June 30, 2025).

To fit within the classes of actions listed in Appendix B to 10 CFR Part 1021, or Appendix B of DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures, a proposal must satisfy the conditions that are integral elements of the classes of actions in Appendix B of both 10 CFR Part 1021 and DOE's NEPA Implementing Procedures.

- There are no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposal that may affect the significance of the environmental effects of the proposal. DOE or an applicant may modify the proposal to avoid reasonably foreseeable adverse significant effects such that the categorical exclusion would apply.


- The proposal has not been segmented to meet the definition of a categorical exclusion.

Based on my review of the proposed action, as NEPA Compliance Officer, I have determined that the proposed action fits within the specified class(es) of action, the other requirements and guidance set forth above are met, and the proposed action is hereby categorically excluded from further NEPA review.

Corporate Validation:

Comments: _____

Applicant Signatory: Stacey Turner
Vice President, Environmental Affairs
Alabama Power Company

Signature: 

Date: 11-19-25

DOE Signatory: Todd Stribley
Director, Environmental Compliance
DOE Loan Programs Office

Signature:

Date Determined: 11/20/2025