

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration

Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Bald Mountain-Taft Substation Fiber Optic Cable Installation (update to previous Categorical Exclusions issued on June 21, 2016 and July 19, 2016)

**Project No.:** P00116

**Project Manager:** Cynthia Rounds, TEP-TPP-1

**Location:** Mineral County, Montana and Shoshone County, Idaho

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B4.7 Fiber Optic Cable

**Description of the Proposed Action:** BPA is installing fiber optic cable between its Taft Substation and its Bald Mountain radio communication site to improve BPA's telecommunications capacity needed to support safe and reliable operation of the transmission system. The project involves about 4.7 miles of fiber optic cable hung on existing lattice steel towers of BPA's Dworshak-Taft 500-kilovolt transmission line, and about 5.5 miles located underground, primarily along Rainy Creek Road (Forest Service Road 391). In addition to the work described in the CXs prepared on June 21, 2016 and July 19, 2016, BPA proposes to improve and rebuild existing access roads, construct short segments of new road, install a permanent bridge, potentially install and remove a temporary bridge, develop landing sites, and add marker balls. More specifically, the additions include the following activities:

- Approximately 2.3 miles of existing access roads would be rebuilt or improved (e.g., graded and rockered, repaired/new drainage features, stabilize cut slopes) to provide construction access to install the aerial portion of the fiber optic cable. The majority of access road work would require ground disturbances up to 16 feet in width, and minor widening of existing access roads may be necessary. The total disturbance from access road work would be about 4.5 acres.
- Two new road segments measuring 50 feet long and 80 feet long would be built to provide construction access to structures 86/6 and 90/5, respectively. Similar to the road improvements described above these new access roads would require ground disturbances up to 16 feet in width. The total disturbance from new access roads would be about 2,080 square feet (0.05 acre).
- A new 36-foot long by 18-foot wide precast, prestressed concrete deck bridge would be installed on an existing access road that currently crosses Randolph Creek at an unimproved ford. Randolph Creek is a fish-bearing stream that flows into the St. Regis River about 2 miles downstream of the proposed bridge crossing. The bridge deck would be set upon two precast, prestressed concrete wingwall abutments. Between each abutment and stream bank, BPA would install buried riprap to protect the abutments from scour. The riprap would be installed outside of the stream channel to maintain an unobstructed opening beneath the bridge. To transition the bridge to the existing access road, BPA would construct approaches at either end of the bridge; each approach would be identified with an object marker per Forest Service specifications. Installation of the road approaches, bridge abutments, and riprap would cover over about 2,000 square feet (0.05 acre) of vegetation. After installation of the bridge, the

disturbed soils will be stabilized and revegetated with the riparian seed mix. Although the bridge will span the stream channel, temporary sandbag coffer dams may be placed in the channel to contain sediment during excavation for riprap placement. All construction activities associated with the bridge will occur between July 1 and August 30, which is the in-water work window prescribed by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. BPA would also install a new gate on the eastern side of the bridge to prevent unauthorized access to the transmission line right-of-way. Installation of the permanent bridge, approaches, and gate would take about 3-5 days.

After completing the bridge and access road improvements BPA plans to install the fiber optic cable during an electrical outage scheduled on the transmission line between September 5 and September 23, 2017. This outage must be scheduled months in advance due to the limited timeframe when the transmission line can be de-energized without adversely affecting BPA's transmission operations in the Idaho and Montana region. As such there is little margin for error to install the bridge and complete the road improvements in advance of the outage.

As a back-up plan BPA would install a temporary bridge in the event it encounters unforeseen delays due to weather or procurement of the custom built bridge deck and abutments. The temporary bridge would consist of two 40-foot long by 8-foot wide metal bridge decks set side by side upon concrete block (e.g., eco-block) abutments. Each abutment would consist of three blocks measuring 2 feet tall by 2 feet wide by 6 feet long set 12 inches into the ground. Additional fill material would be imported to the site to build up the approaches to the bridge deck. The temporary bridge would be installed during the in-water work window (July 1-August 30, 2017) and would be removed upon completion of the fiber optic cable installation at the end of September 2017. Installation and removal of the temporary bridge would take about one day each. If BPA does use the temporary bridge, it will contact Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to coordinate installation of the permanent bridge once the temporary bridge is removed.

- Nine new landings would be constructed at the base of lattice steel towers along the aerial fiber optic cable route and three existing landings would be repaired (e.g., regraded and rocked). The new landings would measure about 30 feet wide by 50 feet long and would provide a level area where BPA construction and maintenance personnel could park vehicles and stage materials and equipment. With the exception of one landing at Structure 89/4, all landings would be constructed using a backhoe, excavator, or similar equipment to excavate the hillside to create the landing. However, the proposed landing site at structure 89/4 is located next to a rock outcrop that cannot be removed with a backhoe and must be blasted away using small, localized explosive charges. The total depth of rock to be blasted away is about 10 feet. The resultant rubble would either be incorporated into the rocked surface of the landing or hauled offsite for proper disposal; no blasted material would be discarded onsite. The total disturbance from landing construction would be about 0.4 acre.
- Ten marker balls would be installed on the new fiber optic cable above Interstate 90 between structures 86/2 and 86/3. Thirteen marker balls would be installed in the span ahead of structure 87/1, while four marker balls would be installed in the span ahead of structure 90/4. The marker balls would be installed via helicopter and require about one day to complete. The helicopter flight path would be limited to areas above the BPA transmission line and would be stipulated in a flight plan submitted by the helicopter operator prior to scheduling the marker ball installation.

**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, July 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/ Justin Moffett

Justin Moffett

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Stacy L. Mason

Stacy L. Mason

NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: May 23, 2017

Attachment(s): 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 site consists of a maintained transmission line right-of-way that crosses Lolo National Forest, Interstate 90, and highly used open gravel roads within Lolo and Panhandle National Forests.

### Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

Environmental Resource Impacts	No Potential for Significance	No Potential for Significance, with Conditions
<b>1. Historic and Cultural Resources</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> The Montana State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) concurred with BPA's determination of No Historic Properties Affected on November 20, 2015. BPA also consulted with the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, and the United States Forest Service. The additional work areas described in this document are within the original Area of Potential Effect which was surveyed for the 2015 agency and tribal consultation. While the tribes did not comment on the project, the Forest Service requested BPA implement the mitigation measures listed below.</p> <p><u>Mitigation:</u> Implement an Inadvertent Discovery Protocol (IDP) in the event any archaeological material is encountered during project activities. Actions to be taken under the IDP include, but are not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Stopping work in the vicinity and immediately notifying the BPA environmental lead, BPA and Forest Service archaeologists, BPA project manager, interested tribes, Montana SHPO, and the appropriate local, state and federal agencies.</li><li>✓ Implementing reasonable measures to protect the discovery site, including any appropriate stabilization or covering.</li><li>✓ Taking reasonable steps to ensure the confidentiality of the discovery site, including restricting access.</li></ul>		
<b>2. Geology and Soils</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<p><u>Explanation:</u> Approximately 5 acres of ground disturbance would occur as a result of the bridge installation, access road improvements, landing improvements, and construction of the new landings and road segments.</p> <p><u>Mitigation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Implement erosion and sediment control best management practices (e.g. straw wattles, silt fence, construction limit staking/markings) prior to any vegetation clearing and ground disturbing activities. Maintain erosion and sediment controls until soils are fully stabilized.</li><li>✓ To the extent practicable, limit soil disturbing activities to periods of dry weather and low soil moisture.</li></ul>		

3. **Plants** (including federal/state special-status species)



Explanation: There are no special-status species and no designated habitat present in the project area. Tree and shrub species that could be removed include Douglas fir, western larch, ponderosa pine, rocky mountain maple, thimble berry, alder, willow, and snowberry.

Mitigation:

- ✓ Reseed disturbed areas with Forest Service approved seed mix.
- ✓ As needed apply herbicides to control new weed infestations resulting from new ground disturbance.
- ✓ Clean and inspect all construction vehicles and equipment prior to entering project site to prevent introduction of invasive weeds.

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



Explanation: There are no special-status species and no designated habitat present in the project area; however, the Canada lynx, a federally-listed threatened species, is known to occur in the broad vicinity. Because of the limited nature of the disturbance planned within BPA right-of way there is no potential to affect Canada lynx or its habitat.

5. **Water Bodies, Floodplains, and Fish** (including federal/state special-status species and ESUs)



Explanation: No federally-listed fish species occur in the project area. The closest known population of bull trout is located more than 15 miles downstream on the proposed Randolph Creek bridge at the confluence of the St. Regis River and Little Joe Creek (personal communication with Wade Fredenburg, USFWS, June 30, 2016). However, Randolph Creek does provide habitat for a genetically unique population of cutthroat trout (pers. comm. Ladd Knotek, MTFWP, July 6, 2016).

Mitigation:

- ✓ Identify tributaries in the BPA Implementation Table (MIT) and construction photomaps as “Sensitive Areas” that must be avoided.
- ✓ Conduct bridge installation during Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks prescribed in-water work window of July 1-August 30.

6. **Wetlands**



Explanation: There are no wetlands within the project area.

7. **Groundwater and Aquifers**



Explanation: No new wells or use of groundwater proposed.

8. **Land Use and Specially Designated Areas**



Explanation: The proposed action would not alter or affect existing land use in the long-term. However, Rainy Creek Road, which is the primary construction route for the proposed action, is a heavily used route that provides public access to the east portal entrance to the Route of the Hiawatha bike trail. Use of the trail peaks annually between Memorial Day and Labor Day, which overlaps with BPA’s proposed summer construction schedule (approximately July 1-September 30, 2017).

Mitigation: To prevent conflicts between the trail users and BPA construction crews, BPA will implement the following measures:

- ✓ Coordinate with the Forest Service public information office to provide advance public notice of the construction schedule via Forest Service website, email notifications, local newspapers or other media.
- ✓ Provide traffic controls, as needed, to ensure the public has safe access to Rainy Creek Road and the east portal entrance to the Route of the Hiawatha at all times during construction.
- ✓ To the extent practicable, limit construction activities that encroach into the Rainy Creek travel lane to the hours of 5:30am-9am.hours.
- ✓ Maintain a minimum 15-foot clearance on Rainy Creek Road at all times during construction.

9. **Visual Quality**



Explanation: The proposed activities would not measurably affect the visual quality of the area; road improvements, the bridge, and marker balls would be visually consistent with existing transmission line facilities and roads.

10. **Air Quality**



Explanation: Fugitive dust and vehicle emissions produced during construction activities would be temporary and minimal.

11. **Noise**



Explanation: Construction noise would be intermittent, temporary, and localized; there are no residences or other sensitive noise receptors in the immediate vicinity. Construction would be limited to daytime hours (5:30 am-7pm).

12. **Human Health and Safety**



Explanation: Project activities would not affect human health or safety.

Mitigation:

- ✓ BPA's road improvement contractor will submit a blasting plan to the US Forest Service prior to conducting blasting.
- ✓ BPA's helicopter operator will submit a flight safety plan to the US Forest Service prior to operating.

### 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:

- 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:

- 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:

- 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:

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**Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination**

Description: BPA has worked closely with the Forest Service to ensure project complies with their management standards and guidelines.

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

Signed: /s/ Justin Moffett  
Justin Moffett ECT-4

Date: May 23, 2017