



— BUREAU OF —  
RECLAMATION

# Categorical Exclusion Checklist

Digital 299 Broadband Project, Trinity County, CA

NCAO-CEC-22-39

*prepared by*

**JEANNE  
MCSLOY** Digitally signed by  
JEANNE MCSLOY  
Date: 2022.11.15  
13:06:37 -08'00'

---

Jeanne McSloy  
Natural Resource Specialist  
Trinity River Restoration Program for Northern California Area Office  
Interior Region 10 · California – Great Basin, Bureau of Reclamation

*concurred by*

**MARK  
CARPER** Digitally signed by  
MARK CARPER  
Date: 2022.11.15  
15:44:23 -08'00'

---

Mark Carper  
Archeologist, Regional Office  
Interior Region 10 · California – Great Basin, Bureau of Reclamation

*approved by*

**ELIZABETH  
HADLEY** Digitally signed by  
ELIZABETH HADLEY  
Date: 2022.11.16  
10:53:17 -08'00'

---

Donald Bader  
Area Manager  
Northern California Area Office  
Interior Region 10 · California – Great Basin, Bureau of Reclamation

# Background

Vero Fiber Networks, LLC, is proposing to develop a fiber optic network in the Northern California region to provide rural connectivity and redundancy across the region, improve safety for travelers and first responders and stimulate economic development. The proposed Project would support long-term connectivity for rural communities in the area, which have been identified by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) as unserved or underserved. The Project alignment generally follows the SR-299 corridor, with some portions sited along county, city and USFS roads. In total, approximately 300 miles of fiber optic line will be installed in buried, underground conduit. The proposed alignment proceeds from Eureka through Willow Creek, Weaverville, and Redding, terminating in Cottonwood; the Project includes connection lines spurring off of the backbone to serve nearby communities. The Digital 299 Broadband Fiber Optic Project will extend approximately 332 miles generally following State Route 299. Of those 332 miles, approximately 2.6 miles are on Reclamation managed lands.

# Proposed Action

The Bureau of Reclamation proposes to authorize the installation of below-ground fiber-optic cables along two discontinuous segments of Reclamation land in Trinity County. Approximately 2.6 of the project's 332 miles are on Reclamation managed lands. The remaining miles cross an assortment of Federal lands including those under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Forest Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service. No lead Federal agency was designated pursuant to 36 CFR § 800.2(a)(2) to address a collective undertaking; therefore, Reclamation's undertaking is restricted to the authorization for the 2.6 miles of the project on Reclamation managed lands.

Installation of the conduit for the fiber-optic cables will entail either horizontal directional drilling or plowing and trenching depending on the geological context. In addition, installation of barrel/access vaults will be necessary along the alignment to splice cables and provide access to the buried conduit. The exact number and location of the vaults within the project corridor is not currently known, but they are generally spaced 2,500 feet from one another. Their dimensions are 4 feet wide by 4 feet long by 4 feet deep. For the horizontal drilling, the bore drill will require entry/exit bore pits with dimensions up to 10 feet by 10 feet, to a maximum depth of 4.5 feet. The bore will have a 10-inch diameter. Bore length normally used for conduit installation is in 500- to 700-foot range, and in some cases over 2,500-foot ranges can be obtained, depending on the substrate. The bore diameter to house the conduit measures 4 inches and will be buried between 36 and 42 inches deep, with a maximum depth of 10 feet achievable when necessary. Plowing entails cutting a narrow slit with a 2- to 3-inch-wide blade and inserting the conduit below ground. Areas of fractured rock or otherwise unsuitable ground for plowing or drilling will be trenched. Trenches will be 6 feet wide and have a maximum depth of 24 inches.

## Extraordinary Circumstances

Below is an evaluation of the extraordinary circumstances as required in 43 CFR 46.215.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. This action would have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment (40 CFR 1502.3).   | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. This action would have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA Section 102(2)(E) and 43 CFR 46.215(c)).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. This action would have significant impacts on public health or safety (43 CFR 46.215(a)).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. This action would have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographical characteristics as historic or cultural resources; parks, recreation, and refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (EO 11990); flood plains (EO 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas (43 CFR 46.215 (b)). | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. This action would have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks (43 CFR 46.215(d)).   | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. This action would establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects (43 CFR 46.215 (e)).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. This action would have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant but cumulatively significant environmental effects (43 CFR 46.215 (f)).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. This action would have significant impacts on properties listed, or eligible for listing, on the National Register of Historic Places as determined by Reclamation (LND 02-01; and 43 CFR 46.215 (g)).   | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. This action would have significant impacts on species listed, or proposed to be listed, on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated critical habitat for these species (43 CFR 46.215 (h)).   | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. This action would violate a Federal, Tribal, State, or local law or requirement imposed for protection of the environment (43 CFR 46.215 (i)).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. This action would affect ITAs (512 DM 2, Policy Memorandum dated December 15, 1993).  | No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Uncertain <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> |

12. This action would have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898; and 43 CFR 46.215 (j)). No  Uncertain  Yes
13. This action would limit access to, and ceremonial use of, Indian sacred sites on Federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or significantly adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 13007; 43 CFR 46.215 (k); and 512 DM 3). No  Uncertain  Yes
14. This action would contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act; EO 13112; and 43 CFR 46.215 (l)). No  Uncertain  Yes

## Exclusion Categories

Bureau of Reclamation Categorical Exclusion - 516 DM 6 D. 10: D.10. Issuance of permits, licenses, easements, and crossing agreements which provide right-of-way over Bureau lands where the action does not allow for or lead to a major public or private action.

## NEPA Action Recommended

CEC – Reclamation’s action is covered by the exclusion category and no extraordinary circumstances exist. The action is excluded from further documentation in an EA or EIS. CPUC has published an Environmental Assessment/Initial Study (EA/IS) which covers the larger project (see below).

## Environmental Commitments, Explanations, and/or Remarks:

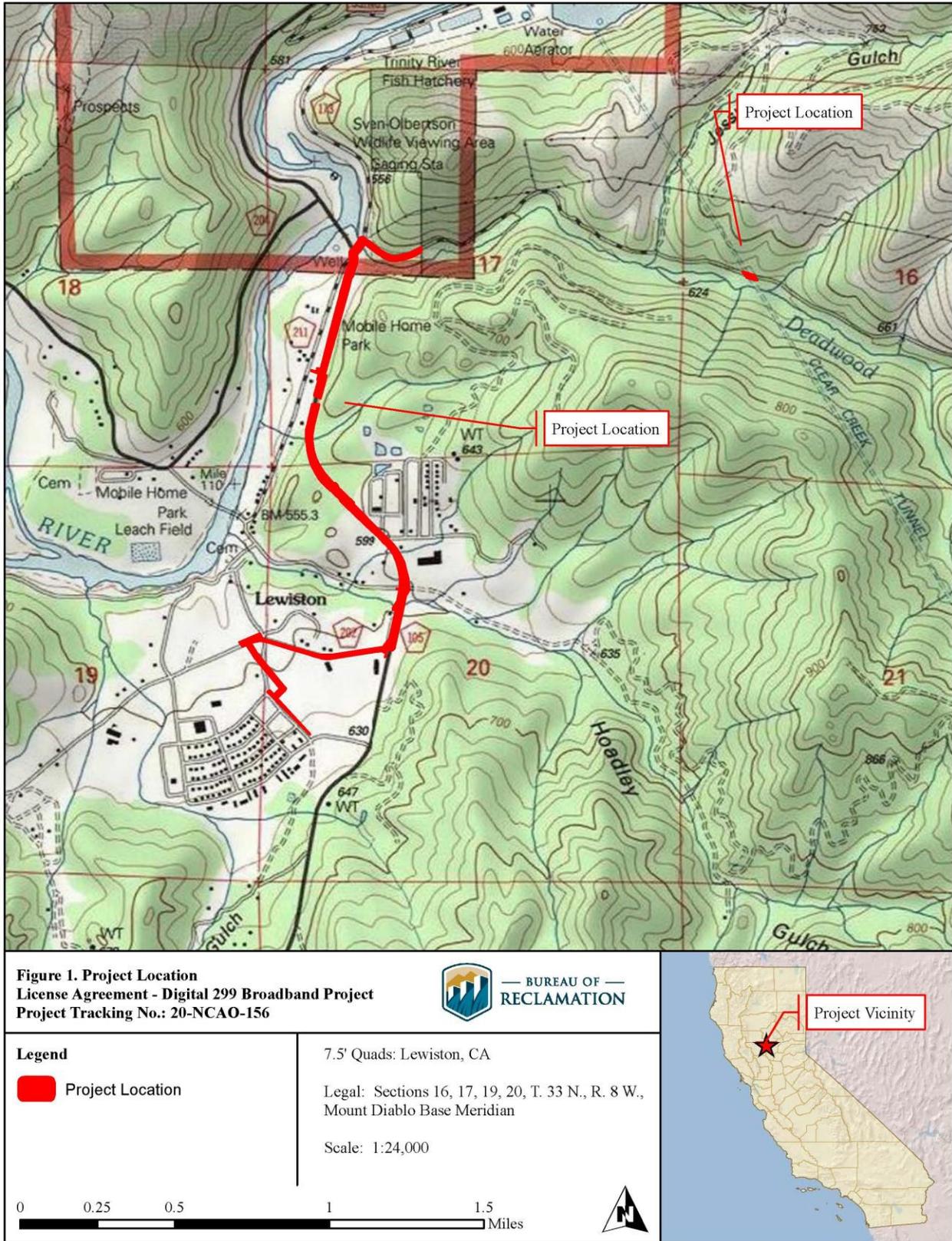
The area of potential effects (APE) consists of two discontinuous sections located in Sections 16, 17, 19, 20 of T. 33 N., R. 8 W. Mount Diablo Base and Meridian, as depicted on the Lewiston, California U.S. Geological Survey 7.5’ quadrangle topographic map. The APE for this undertaking includes all ground disturbing construction. Any required staging will be on existing roadways or parking areas. The APE encapsulates approximately 2.6 acres, with the vertical APE extending to a maximum depth of 10 feet for the deepest bore but is 36 to 42 inches for the majority of the conduit placement.

Reclamation researched the California Natural Diversity Database (CNDDDB), maintained by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and its Biogeographic Information and Observation System (BIOS) mapping complement, as well as the US Fish and Wildlife Service’s (Service) Information, Planning, and Conservation System (IPaC) application, to determine the potential for the presence of species protected by the Federal Endangered Species Act within the work area. No Critical Habitat for Federally- listed species is located in the work area, according to the IPaC report. Work will take place along regularly maintained roads, a disturbed right-of-way with introduced grasses and forbs. No final critical habitat and no contiguous forest that would function as habitat for the Northern spotted owl, or trees that would function

as nesting habitat for migratory birds, are present within or around the work area. There is no habitat for federally listed species in or adjacent to the work area.

CPUC has published an Environmental Assessment/Initial Study (EA/IS) which covers the larger project of which the portion described in this CEC is a part. Reclamation performed an independent review of the above-referenced NEPA documents and determined that they would be sufficient to meet NEPA requirements for the Proposed Action. The EA/IS and associated Appendices are incorporated by reference and are available at: [https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/transcon/EA\\_ISMND.html](https://ia.cpuc.ca.gov/environment/info/transcon/EA_ISMND.html)

**Figure 1.** Vicinity Map



Document Path: P:\mp150\_archaeologic\15312020\NCAO\20-NCAO-156 License Agreement - Digital 299 Broadband Project\GIS\Fig\_1\_20-NCAO-156\_Project Location.mxd

**Figure 2a.** Site Map and Area of Potential Effects



Document Path: P:\mp150\_archaeologic\153\2020\WCAOI\20-NCAO-156 License Agreement – Digital 299 Broadband Project\GIS\APE Maps\Fig\_2-1\_20-NCAO-156\_APE.mxd

**Figure 2b.** Site Map and Area of Potential Effects

