

Grand Coulee-Creston Transmission Line Rebuild Project Final Environmental Assessment

Bonneville Power Administration
DOE/EA-1950
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SUMMARY

Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to rebuild nearly 28 miles of the Grand Coulee-Creston No. 1 115-kilovolt (kV) transmission line between the cities of Coulee Dam in Grant County and Creston in Lincoln County, Washington. In December 2013, BPA issued a draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project, which describes the project, the potential environmental impacts of the project, and mitigation measures to reduce impacts. This final EA addresses changes made to the text of the draft EA, as well as the comments received on the draft EA and BPA's responses to those comments. The draft EA, with the addition of these changes and the response to comments in this final EA document, constitutes the full and complete final EA. The draft EA is available on the project webpage at www.bpa.gov/goto/CouleeCrestonRebuild or by calling 1-800-622-4520.

CHANGES TO THE EA

Changes made to the draft EA primarily include clarification of the amount of new right-of-way proposed, updates of vegetation and wildlife species information, minor adjustments to proposed mitigation to provide more specificity and address redundancies, and other minor edits as shown. Where text has been modified, deleted text is indicated as "strikethrough" format and new text is underlined.

CHANGES TO CHAPTER 2 PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1.1 Rights-of-Way and Easements

Page 2-2 of the Draft EA states incorrectly that "No new right-of-way would be required for the rebuild, but BPA proposes to acquire about 0.5 mile of new easement rights for use of existing access roads". This sentence is revised to state:

~~No new right-of-way would be required for the rebuild.~~ BPA proposes to acquire about 0.1 acre of new right-of-way adjacent to Structures 2/1 and 2/2, and to acquire about 0.5 mile of new easement rights for use of existing access roads.

2.2 No Action Alternative

Page 2-13 of the Draft EA states incorrectly that "right-of-way vegetation management would continue under the No Action Alternative, including the removal of the 58 trees identified in the right-of-way." This sentence is revised to state:

~~Right-of-way vegetation management would continue under the No Action Alternative, including the removal of the 58 trees identified in the right-of-way.~~

CHANGES TO CHAPTER 3 AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES, AND MITIGATION MEASURES

3.4 Water Resources

3.4.3 *Mitigation – Proposed Action*

The following mitigation measure on page 3-26 was removed because it was redundant with the previous mitigation measure:

- ~~Complete culvert installation/replacement work between July 1 and September 15, the WDFW in-water work window.~~

The following mitigation measures on pages 3-26 and 3-27, respectively, were revised to clarify that the measures would only be used where needed to avoid unnecessary disturbances:

- Stabilize approaches to streams and stream crossings with clean rock or steel plates during construction, as needed.
- Place erosion control materials around the work area when working within 25 feet of wetlands. Remove and stabilize material in an upland area, as needed.

The following measure on page 3-27 was revised to include Waters of the United States:

- Require a BPA environmental specialist to meet with contractors and inspectors in the field and visit wetlands or Waters of the United States near or within construction areas to review mitigation measures and any permit requirements.

The following mitigation measure on page 3-27 was deleted because it was redundant with a previous measure:

- ~~Conduct as much work as possible during the dry season when streamflow, rainfall, and runoff are low.~~

3.5 Vegetation

3.5.1 *Affected Environment*

Vernal Pools

The last paragraph on page 3-33 of the Draft EA has been revised to clarify that the identified vernal pool near structure 28/6 is located outside of the right-of-way:

For other pools, such as the one shown in Figure 3-10 that is located outside of the right-of-way near structure 28/6, heavy grazing has compromised the habitat quality.

Special Status Plant Species

The second-to-last paragraph on page 3-38 of the Draft EA has been revised as follows to add information about two additional special status plant species:

A rare plant survey was conducted in May 2013 for the entire length of the existing project right-of-way excluding cultivated areas, and along access roads located outside of the project right-of-way. The survey included a general reconnaissance of vegetation communities and rare plant habitats (see Figures 3-12 for a map of the locations of special status plants found in the project area). Prior to the survey, a target list of special status species known to occur in Grant and Lincoln Counties was compiled, based upon Washington State Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Program maintained lists for Grant and Lincoln Counties (WDNR 2013c; Appendix E). The project counties are area is within the potential habitat range of ~~only one~~ three federally-listed plant species, Spalding's catchfly ~~silene~~ (*Silene spaldingii*), Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), and Northern wormwood (*Artemisia campestris* var. *wormskioldii*).

The Spalding's catchfly which is listed as a *threatened species* and grows predominantly in bunchgrass grasslands and sagebrush-steppe, and occasionally in open pine communities. This species is found in eastern Washington and is most often associated with the canyon grasslands, Palouse grasslands, intermontaine valleys, Blue Mountain basins, and channeled scablands (FWS 2007). The plant is typically found at elevations ranging from 1,200 to 5,300 feet and is usually associated with deep, productive loess soils (fine, windblown soils). Spalding's catchfly is generally found in areas with relatively higher soil moisture along swales or on northwest to northeast facing slopes. This species was not identified during sensitive plant species surveys and does not have any known occurrences near the project right-of-way (WDNR 2013d).

Ute ladies'-tresses are listed as threatened in both Grant and Lincoln counties. While the orchid has been discovered in the Okanogan area and along the Columbia River in north-central Washington (USFWS 2010), it occurs outside of the project area (WDNR 2011). The orchid occurs along riparian edges, gravel bars, old oxbows, high flow channels, and moist to wet meadows along perennial streams augmented by seasonal flooding, snowmelt, runoff and irrigation (USFWS 2013). Habitat for the species is not present in the project area and the species was not identified during sensitive plant surveys.

Northern wormwood is listed as a candidate species in Grant County. Only two known populations of this plant occur in Washington State. The known populations are located in disjunct sites about 201 river miles apart along the Columbia River (Natureserve 2013). This plant occurs outside of the project area (WDNR 2011) and was not identified during sensitive plant surveys.

3.5.3 *Mitigation – Proposed Action*

The following measure on page 3-43 was revised as indicated since surveys for Douglas constricted onion were completed in May 2013:

- ~~Conduct surveys for Douglas constricted onion within the areas where it was found to occur during the pre-construction survey and~~ Install signage, stakes, fencing, and/or flagging around areas found during the May 2013 surveys to have Douglas constricted onion present prior to construction to minimize disturbance ~~and to restrict vehicles and equipment to designated routes.~~

The following measure on page 3-43 was removed since weed control efforts would continue in the right-of-way as part of ongoing vegetation management efforts:

- ~~Treat identified noxious weed infestations where possible prior to construction either manually, mechanically, and/or chemically.~~

3.6 Fish

3.6.3 *Mitigation – Proposed Action*

The following measure on page 3-49 was deleted since it was repeated incorrectly in this section:

- ~~Limit disturbance areas to the minimum necessary when working near wetland areas. Install stakes or flagging to restrict vehicles and equipment to designated routes and areas.~~

The following measure on page 3-49 was corrected to include the subject of the sentence:

- Stage construction vehicles and equipment at least 50 feet from any waterbody unless authorized by a permit or the vehicle is travelling on an existing road.

The following measure on page 3-49 was revised as shown:

- Conduct all culvert installation/replacement work in the dry streambed, when there is no flow so as to avoid any impacts to fish species, if possible.

The following mitigation measure on page 3-50 was removed because it was redundant to the previous mitigation measure:

- ~~Complete culvert installation/replacement work between July 1 and September 15, the WDFW in-water work window.~~

3.7 Wildlife

3.7.1 *Affected Environment*

Federally Threatened and Endangered Wildlife Species

The entry for the gray wolf in the “Federal Status” column of Table 3-10 on page 3-56 has been updated to read as follows:

Recovery (Grant County) and Endangered (Lincoln County)

The sources for Table 3-10 on page 3-56 identified at the bottom of this table have been updated as follows:

Sources: Natureserve 2013; USFWS 2013, Lewis Pers. Comm. 2014

3.7.3 *Mitigation – Proposed Action*

The first mitigation measure on page 3-65 has been revised as follows:

- ~~Inspect trees proposed to be cut for the presence of nesting avian species—cavity nesters, small and large stick nests—prior to cutting to minimize impacts to nesting birds. Clear trees outside of the primary nesting period (February 1 through July 30) to minimize the impact to nesting birds, if possible.~~

The following measure on page 3-65 was removed since it is redundant with the revised previous measure:

- ~~Document all occupied or active nest on powerlines and trees and ensure that no trees containing nests are cut during the nesting season, typically February 1 through July 30.~~

The following measure on page 3-65 was removed since construction activities would occur outside of the breeding season for golden eagles, ferruginous hawks, and greater sage grouse:

- ~~Conduct at least two roadside surveys for occupied or active golden eagle and ferruginous hawks nesting territories (March and May) and daily during a three week period during early March or early May) for greater sage grouse leks within potentially suitable habitat locations to determine the presence before construction activities begin.~~

The following measure on page 3-65 was revised as shown:

- Conduct walking surveys within suitable habitat for Washington ground squirrel during April to June prior to construction to determine the presence of this species within the project area.

3.11 Cultural Resources

3.11.3 Mitigation – Proposed Action

The following measures were added to Section 3.11.3 on page 3-83:

- Implement the “Avoidance and Monitoring Plan for Bonneville Power Administration's Grand Coulee-Creston No. 1 Transmission Line Rebuild Project, Grant and Lincoln Counties, Washington.”
- Notify the BPA Archaeologist and COTR immediately if any inadvertent discoveries are made.
- Notify the Grant County or Lincoln County coroner if human remains or suspected human remains are identified.

The following measures on page 3-83 were revised as indicated:

- ~~Work areas would be restricted~~ Restrict work areas to avoid disturbance to ~~48~~ 19 cultural resource sites. Work areas would be accessed via specific routes to avoid two cultural resource sites. An archaeological monitor would be employed at ~~seven~~ 11 sites to further ensure impacts ~~were~~ are avoided.
- ~~Stop If ground-disturbing activities if they cause an inadvertent discovery, all activities in the vicinity of the find would be stopped per BPA’s Inadvertent Discovery Procedure. Inadvertent discoveries can include human remains, structural remains, Native American artifacts, or Euroamerican artifacts that were previously unknown. The BPA archaeologist, Washington SHPO, and affected Tribes would be notified immediately.~~
- ~~Operations would~~ Stop operations immediately within 200 feet of ~~the an~~ an inadvertent discovery if human remains, suspected human remains, or any items suspected to be related to a human burial (i.e., funerary items, sacred objects, or objects of cultural patrimony) are encountered during project construction. ~~The area would be secured around the discovery and the Grant County or Lincoln County Sheriff, the BPA archaeologist, the SHPO, and affected Tribes would be contacted immediately.~~

3.12 Visual Resources

3.12.3 Mitigation – Proposed Action

The following measure on page 3-93 was deleted because it was not an appropriate measure to address impacts to visual resources:

- ~~Incorporate erosion control BMPs into the construction of access roads to minimize permanent visual impacts on nearby residential viewers.~~

The following measure on page 3-93 was revised to remove the time period:

- Inspect reseeded sites periodically ~~over a 3-year period~~ to verify adequate growth. If necessary, implement contingency measures, such as reseeded, to ensure development of adequate growth and vegetation cover. Monitor areas replanted with woody species until a 70-percent establishment rate is met.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

BPA released the draft EA in December 2013 for public comment. BPA sent the EA, or a notification of the EA’s availability, to agencies and potentially affected or interested parties. This section presents comments received on the draft EA and responses to those comments.

BPA received comments from five entities in writing through comment forms and letters. Each comment submittal was given an identifying number that corresponds to the order in which the submittal was logged into BPA’s comment file. Comments are numbered consecutively as they are received. Please note that breaks in the number sequence result when comments are deleted because they were submitted in error or have inappropriate content (such as SPAM). Table 1 provides the comment submittal number and the associated author and affiliation. The comments and BPAs responses to each are provided below.

Table 1. Public Comments on the Draft Environmental Assessment

Comment Number	Comment Author / Affiliation
GCCEA13 0003	Samuel Dart / Grant County Public Works Department
GCCEA13 0004	Citizen at public meeting
GCCEA13 0005	Citizen at public meeting
GCCEA13 0006	Citizen at public meeting
GCCEA13 0007	James Gollehon / landowner

Comment GCCEA13 0003

Please ensure that a Work in Right-of-Way permit is submitted with plans for each crossing of any Grant County roadway. Once reviewed, approved and signed by the Public Works Director permit will be returned and crossing(s)/work will be allowed within Grant County road Right-of-Way. Any questions please contact me at the number entered into the form. Thank you.

Response to Comment GCCEA13 0003

BPA permitting staff is coordinating with the Grant County Public Works Department to provide the requested Work in Right-of-Way permit application and associated plans for each crossing of Grant County roadways and to answer any questions that the department might have about those crossings. BPA also would coordinate with the department as needed during rebuilding of the transmission line concerning the roadway crossings.

Comment GCCEA13 0004

Please have your studies look at:

I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO LOOK AT MATCHING THE CURRENT STEEL TOWER WITH THIS UPGRADE. AS YOU KNOW, THESE WOOD POLES END UP BEING OFFSET FROM THE PLACEMENT OF THE OTHER TOWERS IN OUR FIELDS. IT WOULD BE A GREAT HELP TO HAVE EACH SET OF TOWERS - POLES ADJACENT TO EACH OTHER RATHER THAN HAVE A RANDOM POLE BY ITSELF IN THE FIELD.

Response to Comment GCCEA13 0004

Section 2.1 of the draft EA discusses the Proposed Action and the replacement of the wood-pole structures that would occur. In identifying locations for replacement structures for transmission line rebuild projects, BPA attempts to minimize, to the maximum extent practical, interference with agricultural practices within the project area. For the Proposed Action, BPA has determined that moving the wood-pole structures to align with the steel lattice structures that are also within the right-of-way is not feasible due to span length requirements for the wood-pole structures. Similarly, designing the line to be comprised of steel structures that are of similar design would significantly increase the cost of the project and would not meet BPA design standards for 115-kv lines.

Comment GCCEA13 0005

I need more information about:

WEED CONTROL DURING CONSTRUCTION. ALSO, DISAPPOINTED
IN WEED MANAGEMENT ON PAST PROJECTS.

REQUEST TO MOVE TOWARDS W/IN HIS PROPERTY FOR GROW
OF AGRICULTURAL PRACTICES.

I have these other comments:

WHEN DOES CONSTRUCTION START? WHAT "END" WILL YOU
START AT?

ELECTRICITY DURING CONSTRUCTION?

Response to Comment GCCEA13 0005

Section 3.5.2 of the draft EA evaluates the potential impacts of noxious weeds on the surrounding area and Section 3.5.3 describes the mitigation measures that would be used to minimize the potential spread of noxious weeds. BPA would work with landowners to assure their concerns about the potential spread of noxious weeds are addressed.

See response to comment GCCEA13-0004 concerning relocation of the replacement wood-pole structures for the Proposed Action.

As discussed in Section 2.1.6 in the draft EA, access road improvements would likely begin in September 2014. Transmission line construction would likely begin in May 2015, or shortly thereafter. Project construction activities would generally begin at the western end of the line. All major construction activities are expected to be completed by November 2015.

In general, power would be maintained to BPA's customers throughout the rebuild project. However, there could be short periods of time at night, lasting up to several hours, when rebuilding portions of the existing Grant County PUD and Wilbur taps, as described in Section 2.1.3 in the draft EA, could interrupt electrical service. During these times, the construction crews would be switching the routing of power at the Grant County PUD Tap at structure 2/7 and at the Wilbur Tap between structures 19/3 and 19/4. BPA would coordinate the timing of these activities with Grant County PUD, Avista, and Inland Power and Light to assure that these interruptions in service are as brief as possible and have the minimum impact possible to area residences and businesses.

Comment GCCEA13 0006

1/7/2014	GC
<u>Comments:</u>	
- WHEN DOES BPA EXPECT THE NEXT UPGRADE w/in THIS PARTICULAR RIGHT OF WAY?	
- THE DAMAGES THAT ARE EXPECTED ARE WORKED ABOUT CROP LOSS WITH THIS PROJECT BECAUSE OF PAST PROJECTS → CONTRACTORS DID NOT STAY w/in the access roads in ROW	
-	

Response to Comment GCCEA13 0006

BPA has been implementing a number of improvements to the four transmission lines located in the Grand Coulee-Creston right-of-way over the past several years. With implementation of the proposed rebuild project addressed in this EA, BPA will have completed all system upgrades to these transmission lines and at this time has no future plans for additional upgrades.

Section 3.3.2 of the draft EA describes the potential impacts to rangelands and agricultural lands. As described in Section 3.3.3 of the draft EA, BPA would work with landowners to try to minimize impacts to agricultural lands and crops, including consulting with landowners to identify travel routes across cultivated farmland that would minimize crop damage, restoring disturbed farmland back to the pre-project conditions, compensating landowners for the value of commercial crops damaged or destroyed by construction activities, and working with applicable landowners to maintain their CRP status or provide compensation if the usage is not allowed by the Douglas County Office of Farmland Preservation.

Comment GCCEA13 0007

At structure 21/6, I have a wildlife habitat containing native shrubs and grass. The area was planted by my grandfather shortly after the wood poles were installed in 1941. Over the decades BPA installed two taller structures in and next to the habitat with minimal impact to the plants. I would hope that this project will not require any major trimming or removal of plants.

Response to Comment GCCEA13 0007

As described in Section 3.3.3, BPA would coordinate with landowners to address their concerns to the extent possible and minimize potential impacts to their lands. BPA also would implement restoration or stabilization actions as soon as possible after ground disturbing activities and would reseed all disturbed areas as soon as possible after construction, with an appropriate seed mix that is discussed with and agreed upon with landowners. Native seed mixes would be used where appropriate and effective.

REFERENCES

- Center for Plant Conservation. 2010. CPC National Collection Plant Profile: *Hackelia venusta*. Website:
http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/collection/cpc_viewprofile.asp?CPCNum=2109. Accessed April 2, 2014.
- Lewis, S. 2014. Telephone Conversation between Andrew Montano, Environmental Planning and Analysis Group, Bonneville Power Administration, and Stephen Lewis, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Central Washington office on March 27, 2014.
- Natureserve. 2013. *Artemisia campestris* var. *wormskioldii*. Website:
<http://explorer.natureserve.org/>. Accessed April 2, 2014.
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). 2013. Ute ladies'-tresses (*Spiranthes diluvialis*), Nevada Fish & Wildlife Office. Website:
http://www.fws.gov/nevada/protected_species/plants/species/ute_ladies_tresses.html. Last updated March 20, 2013. Accessed April 1, 2014.
- USFWS. 2010. Ute Ladies'-Tresses Orchid. Website: <http://www.fws.gov/mountain-prairie/species/plants/uteladiestress/>. Last updated: May 7, 2010. Accessed April 1, 2014.
- USFWS. 2007. Recovery Plan for *Silene spaldingii* (Spalding's Catchfly). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Portland, Oregon. Xiii + 187 pages. Website:
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- WDNR (Washington Department of Natural Resources). 2011. State of Washington Natural Heritage Plan. 2011 Update; 8pp. Olympia, WA 98504