

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Day Mt. Spokane Tap Switch Replacement Project

**PP&A No.:** 4,272

**Project Manager:** Meadow Nelson, TEPL-TPP-1

**Location:** Spokane County, WA

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3 Routine Maintenance; B4.6 Additions and Modifications to Transmission Facilities

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration owns and operates the Bell – Boundary No. 1 230 kV transmission line, which runs from Bell Substation in Spokane County, WA, to Boundary Substation in Pend Oreille County, WA. In line mile 5 and 6 of the line as it trends northward from Bell Substation, two disconnect switches located ahead-on-line and back-on-line to the Day Mountain Spokane Tap are malfunctioning and in need of replacement. The current disconnect switches, located near structures 5/2 and 6/1 of the Bell – Boundary No. 1 line, are difficult to operate, require a two person crew to utilize, and pose electrical arc and fire hazards. BPA is proposing to replace the two switches with new switches that meet safety and quality standards.

The existing switch stands and operating platforms would be reused, but modified to meet existing standards. Surge arrestors would be added to both switch sites, near the existing platforms, supported by a modified direct embed steel pole. New grounding and cathodic protection would be installed, which would entail trenching, approximately two feet deep, and up to 200 feet in length. Crushed rock would potentially be placed near the modified switch stands to stabilize the ground surface and provide fire risk mitigation. All work would be conducted within the existing transmission easement, and all ground disturbance would be within the cleared transmission right-of-way. All ground disturbance would be rocked, or re-graded to match existing contours and seeded. Equipment would likely include an electrical line bucket truck, an auger truck, an excavator, and light duty trucks.

**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, Jul. 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/ Aaron Siemers*

Aaron Siemers

Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

*/s/ Sarah T. Biegel*

Date: April 12, 2021

Sarah T. Biegel

NEPA Compliance Officer

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.

**Proposed Action: Day Mt. Spokane Tap Switch Replacement Project**

## **Project Site Description**

The Day Mt. Spokane Tap Switch Replacement Project is located in northeastern Washington, in the Spokane Valley Outwash Plains ecoregion. The ecoregion is characterized by relatively mild topography of gently rolling plains within the Spokane River Valley. During the Missoula Floods, the Spokane Valley was the primary drainage outlet for the massive flood waters. The flood waters and glacial outwash deposited coarse, gravelly soils, though some areas within the region are more suitable for farming due to the later deposition of glacial lake sediment. Ponderosa pine and Douglas-fir woodlands comprise the dominant native vegetation, though much of the region today has been cleared for farmland and suburban development. Summers are dry, and winters are cold, rainy, and often snowy. The Spokane River, Hangman Creek, and numerous smaller waterways drain the landscape.

The project area is located in the northeastern limits of the greater Spokane metro area, where suburban development begins to meet farmland. The 230 kV Bell – Boundary No. 1 line and Bell – Usk No. 1 line share the transmission easement, which is approximately 250 feet wide. The electrical conductor for both lines is supported by large steel lattice transmission towers located approximately every 1000 feet. To maintain safety and reliability standards, vegetation within the transmission right-of-way (ROW) is periodically managed to remove trees and promote low-growing species such as grass. Vegetation at the work sites includes native bunch grasses, invasive grasses, and common weeds, with Ponderosa pines bordering the cleared ROW. Residential subdivisions are present on either side of the ROW, though to the east the land use quickly trends toward rural residential and farming communities.

The legal description of the project area is Township 27 North, Range 43 East, Section 26 and Section 35.

## **Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources**

### **1. Historic and Cultural Resources**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA engaged in consultation with the WA Dept. of Historic Preservation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe, the Spokane Tribe, and the Kalispell Tribe. BPA cultural resources staff reviewed the project, developed an area of potential effect (APE), and initiated consultation on June 11, 2020. BPA conducted a records review of previously recorded historic and cultural resources in and near the APE, and performed a ground survey of the APE. On March 12, 2021, BPA issued a determination of no adverse effect to historic properties. The consulting parties had no comments or concerns during the statutory 30-day waiting period. Therefore, according to

Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act and 36 CFR Part 800, BPA's consultation requirements have been fulfilled.

Notes:

- BPA would implement a cultural resources inadvertent discovery plan, including an immediate work stoppage, notification to BPA cultural resources staff, and consulted parties, in the unlikely event of cultural or historic resource discovery during construction.

## 2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Soil and ground disturbance for the proposed project would be relatively minimal. Approximately 0.25 acres of soil would be disturbed at each switch location. The project area is generally flat and extensive earth work would not be required. Existing switch stands and operating platforms would be modified and reused. Ground disturbance associated with the new direct embed steel surge arrestor structures would be localized around two steel poles, and have a minimal footprint. Trenching associated with grounding would have the largest potential footprint; approximately two feet in depth and up to 200 feet long; however, upon installation of the grounding wire, the disturbed soils would be backfilled, stabilized, and seeded.

Notes:

- Disturbed soils would be re-contoured, stabilized with straw, and seeded with a native seed mix.

## 3. Plants (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Mobilizing equipment and excavation in the proposed work area would disturb the local vegetation, including native grasses as well as invasive plants. However, due to the limited scope of the project, vegetation disturbance would be minimal, and these areas would be reseeded with a native seed mix upon project completion.

BPA obtained a species list for the project from the US Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (USFWS). There are no Endangered Species Act (ESA) – listed plant species in the project area.

Notes:

- Disturbed vegetation would be seeded with a native grass seed mix upon project completion

## 4. Wildlife (including Federal/state special-status species and habitats)

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Mobilizing equipment, demolition, and construction activity in the proposed project area would temporarily disturb wildlife. As a residential/rural residential area, wildlife could include small mammal, birds, deer, etc. However, disturbance would be temporary, and limited to day-time, working hours. The ROW provides ample habitat areas immediately adjacent to the work locations, which would be localized with a project of this scope.

BPA obtained a species list for project from the USFWS. Yellow-billed cuckoo is listed as threatened in the project area. BPA has determined that, due to lack of suitable habitat present in the project area, the proposed action would have no effect on yellow-billed cuckoo and proposed yellow-billed cuckoo critical habitat.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no waterbodies in the project area. The nearest waterbody, known as Deadman Creek, is over half a mile from the structure 5/2 work location. The work would not impact floodplains, or effect fish or fish habitat.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the proposed project area. No wetland indicator plant species or wetland hydrology is present in or near the work areas.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Groundwater and aquifers would not be affected by proposed project activities. Excavation would not occur at depths that would intersect groundwater or impact aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The land is privately owned and not located within a specially-designated area. Current land use is transmission line easement and open space area. Proposed project activities would not impact existing land use.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Proposed project actions would slightly alter the visual profile of the immediate work area. However, proposed modifications to the transmission hardware in the corridor would not significantly impact the existing visual quality, which is dominated by the high-voltage transmission line.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A relatively small and localized amount of vehicle emissions and potential dust would be generated during project activity.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise would be generated during typical work hours during construction, but the project would have no impacts on long-term noise generation in the project area.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA would perform job hazard analysis prior to the start of construction and each day in the field potential safety hazards would be identified and mitigated. Overall, the project would provide human health and safety benefits, as the new proposed switches will reduce arc flash and fire risk.

### 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: N/A

**Require siting and construction or major expansion of waste storage, disposal, recovery, or treatment facilities (including incinerators) that are not otherwise categorically excluded.**

Explanation: N/A

**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: N/A

**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: N/A

### Landowner Notification, Involvement, or Coordination

Description: BPA would coordinate project actions with all underlying landowners and other stakeholders on the project.

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

Signed: /s/ Aaron Siemers                      Date: April 12, 2021  
Aaron Siemers, EPR-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist