

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Ashe-Marion No. 2 / Ashe-Slatt No. 1 Span 54/5 Overhead Ground Wire Repair Project

**PP&A No.:** 4,444

**Project Manager:** Dianne Bonner – TEPL-TPP-1

**Location:** Benton County, Washington

**Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021):** B1.3, Routine Maintenance; B3.2 Aviation Activities

**Description of the Proposed Action:** Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to repair damaged overhead ground wire in line mile 54 of the Ashe-Slatt No. 1 and Ashe-Marion No. 2 500-kV transmission lines. BPA owns and operates the 500 kV Ashe-Marion No. 2 high voltage transmission line, which runs from Ashe Substation in Benton County, WA, to Marion Substation in Marion County, OR. The transmission line is double circuit at this location, and the steel lattice structures also carry the Ashe-Slatt No. 1 500 kV transmission line. In the event of ice loading in wintry conditions, the ground wire would be at risk of failure.

BPA proposes to repair the overhead ground wire with repair rods which wrap around the ground wire restoring its strength and conductivity. Marker balls, which are installed to provide a visual reference point to the overhead ground wire, would be removed in span 54/5 to complete the repair. The marker balls would not be replaced since the span has airway marking lights installed, which serve a similar function.

In order to remove the marker balls and repair the ground wire, human external cargo (HEC) would be utilized, which involves transport of the electrical workers to the damaged section of the line with a helicopter. The electrical workers would be attached to the helicopter through a harness and rope system, and suspended at the repair site while work is completed. No ground disturbance would be required. A helicopter landing zone would be established nearby in a parking lot at Crow Butte Park, operated by the Port of Benton.

**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/ Katey Grange*

Katey C. Grange  
NEPA Compliance Officer

Date: October 7, 2021

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:** Ashe-Marion No. 2 / Ashe-Slatt No. 1 Span 54/5 Overhead Ground Wire Repair Project

## **Project Site Description**

The project is located in the Columbia Basin of eastern Washington and Oregon. Native vegetation is dominated by grassland. The climate is dry, but agricultural operations are made possible by irrigation in those locations with suitable soils. The project area is located over the Columbia River. The Columbia River in eastern Washington and Oregon is controlled by a series of dams that manage flows and river levels, generate hydroelectric power, and facilitate transport. The John Day Dam is located approximately 45 miles downstream of the project site.

The project site is located on a 0.75 mile span of the transmission line as it crosses the main branch of the Columbia River. The Ashe-Marion No. 2 / Ashe-Slatt No. 1 line is a double circuit line, supported by steel lattice transmission structures. One structure (54/5) is located in Crow Butte Park, an island in the Columbia River, immediately north of the project area and managed by the Port of Benton. The other structure (55/1) is located near the banks of the Columbia River in the State of Oregon. The overhead ground wire is the topmost wire supported by the steel lattice transmission structures.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A BPA Archaeologist has reviewed the proposed project and determined that the project has no potential to effect historic properties, per Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

### **2. Geology and Soils**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would be required. The helicopter landing zone would be located in an existing parking lot at Crow Butte Park.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, BPA obtained a species list from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021. No special status species are present in the project area. No ground disturbance would be required to complete the project.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: In accordance with the Endangered Species Act, BPA obtained a species list from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2021. BPA has determined that the project would have “no effect” on yellow-billed cuckoo and the candidate species monarch butterfly. Helicopter operations would be conducted outside of the bird nesting season, so potential impacts to other birds including bald eagles that may be present in the project area would be minimized. Disturbance to nearby wildlife would occur due to helicopter operations, however, impacts would temporary and isolated in the immediate project area.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No in-water work is planned. BPA has determined that the project would have “no effect” to bull trout, anadromous salmonids, and associated critical habitat in the Columbia River.

Notes:

- Spill kits would be present at the helicopter landing zone in the event of accidental release of petroleum products.

#### **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No wetlands are present in the project area. No ground disturbance would be required to complete the work.

#### **Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No ground disturbance would be required, therefore groundwater and aquifers would not be impacted by the proposed action.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Existing land use which consists of a high voltage electrical transmission corridor would not be impacted by the proposed action. A helicopter landing zone would temporarily (1 to 2 days) established at the parking lot of Crow Butte Park and would not restrict the use of other areas in the park. The area would be cleared and restored to previous land use upon project completion.

#### **8. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The existing visual profile, which includes the high voltage transmission line span across the Columbia River, would not be altered by the proposed project. The project would remove marker balls and they would not be replaced since airway marking lights are already present on the line. Removing the marker balls would reduce the visual impact of the transmission line and overhead ground wire.

## 9. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Impacts to air quality may occur during project activity, including dust and exhaust generated by the helicopter operations. These impacts would be temporal.

## 10. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Noise would likely be generated by helicopter operations. The area is rural and noise would not be expected to impact the general public. Electrical workers and helicopter pilots would wear ear protection to mitigate impacts of noise generated by the project. Any noise generated would be temporary and only relevant during project operations.

## 11. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The overhead ground wire is a critical component of the high voltage transmission system and the reliability of the ground wire is key to ensuring safe operations of the electrical transmission grid. Identifying and repairing risks to the ground wire reduces risk to human health and safety.

HEC operations pose additional risk to electrical workers. HEC would only be conducted by highly trained professionals with significant experience working in similar conditions.

Notes:

- A Safety Plan which includes HEC operations and other identified risks to human health and safety would be submitted by the electrical contractor and must be approved by the BPA Safety Organization prior to mobilizing to the work site.

### **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 continue to coordinate project activities with all stakeholders and land managers in the project area, including the Port of Benton and Crow Butte Park.

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

Aaron Siemers, EPR-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Date: October 7, 2021