Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy

Proposed Action: Scooteney Substation Expansion

Project No.: P02526

Project Manager: Deborah Staats

Location: Franklin County, Oregon

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B4.11, Electric power substations and interconnection facilities, and B1.24 Property transfers

Description of the Proposed Action: BPA is proposing to update and expand the Scooteney 115kV Substation in Franklin County, Washington, about six miles west of the town of Connell. Originally built in 1953, the substation would be updated and outfitted with a variety of new equipment, and would be expanded to the east by about 130 feet, and to the north by about 25 feet, to allow for greater capacity for interconnection. For the expansion of the substation, BPA would acquire the land from the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). This process is underway and BPA would require this signed CX for finalization of the land transfer.

Starting in the fall of 2022, the land acquired for the substation expansion would be cleared of vegetation, excavated to about six feet below ground surface, and leveled using heavy equipment. A compacted sub base would be created and new equipment footings would be installed. Switchyard rock would be applied over the new yard space, and a roadbed demarcated and installed for vehicle travel. In the current yard, BPA would remove and replace a capacitor bank and its associated breaker and disconnect switch, replace two power circuit breakers (PCB), replace a fuse rack, and replace the control house. The control house would be replaced by a prefabricated modular building (PMB). The substation's transformer bank #3 would be replaced and a grounding transformer removed. A secondary oil containment system would be installed to pipe transformer oil from the new locations to a newly installed underground vault in the existing yard space. All existing footings of replaced equipment would be removed and the holes filled in accordance with the substation's switchyard rocking profile. The new equipment would be placed in various locations in the existing and new yard areas. A new eight-foot-tall security fence would be installed around the expansion area.

Various civil improvements would be installed outside the new, gated substation yard. A 71-foot-by-25-foot stormwater management feature that would include a pre-settling basin and infiltration pond would be installed to the north of the expansion area. A drainage ditch would be excavated and vegetated around the expansion and routed to the north. A new entrance road would be constructed to the south of the substation on the planned acquisition parcel. It would originate from Washington State Highway 17 and head east over a newly installed ditch culvert at the existing substation's western edge, then travel the substation's southern perimeter to enter the new substation yard area from a new southern gate. Finally, a spoils embankment would be created outside the new southeast corner of the yard. This and all exposed, disturbed soil would

be vegetated with an appropriate native species mix. The project would take two fall-to-winter seasons (2022 and 2023). Starting in the spring of 2023, BPA would treat outbreaks of noxious plant species during the 2023 growing season in all areas disturbed by construction.

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/ Michael J. O'Connell
Michael J. O'Connell
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

/s/ Sarah T. Biegel *April 19, 2022*
Sarah T. Biegel Date
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: Scooteney Substation Expansion

Project Site Description

The Scooteney Substation is in a semi-arid area of the Columbia Plateau, in the southeastern quadrant of Washington. Vegetation is a scrubland type with mixed grasses and low shrubs with noxious species (*Kochia* sp.) and other non-native plant species present. There are no natural surface water features in the substation vicinity. Irrigated agriculture can be found one-to-two miles in any direction from the substation, but there is mainly open, low, rolling topography to those features.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: A Cultural Resources pedestrian survey of the full project area was performed, and Cultural Resources monitoring was conducted for geotechnical testing of discrete proposed work locations at the site. One historic refuse dump was identified (45FR00647 [Scoot-TC-01]) and was recommended as *not eligible* for listing on to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). However, the substation and existing control house has been determined to be eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as a historic district. BPA determined that removal of the control house would result in an *adverse effect to historic resources*. To mitigate for these adverse effects, BPA developed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) that requires BPA to provide grant funding to the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation's Sivinski Fund to support three separate restoration and rehabilitation projects throughout Washington. The MOA was signed on December 14, 2021.

Notes:

- If archaeological material is encountered during project activities, the contractor must stop work in the vicinity and immediately notify the BPA environmental lead, archaeologist, and project manager; the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Wanapum Band of Indians; and the appropriate local, state, and Federal agencies.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: While approximately 0.7 acre of undeveloped land would be converted to impermeable substation yard and access road, the majority of excavated soils would remain near the site of removal where it would be used to construct a vegetated embankment. After vegetation establishment, it is assumed that the embankment would

function naturally to allow percolation of precipitation and provide habitat much like the surrounding land cover. There would be no effect to geology of the site. The bedrock may be as shallow as 5.5 feet below the ground surface as was noted in a geotechnical boring study performed at the site. If there is some interception of bedrock during site excavation, it would be minor and not affect the bedrock on a meaningful scale.

Notes:

- Use a native seed mix best suited to the areas of disturbance and all appropriate best management practices (BMPs) to stabilize the new embankment feature's soil.
- Construct the embankment for safe traversing by a tractor for seeding purposes.
- Per the Geotechnical Report of June 2020, have a Geotechnical Engineer verify that the report's recommendations are followed and that conditions observed during footing excavations are as anticipated.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Searches of state heritage database occurrences resulted in no records of sensitive State- or federally-listed plant species within at least four miles. During a general pedestrian survey of the project area, large amounts of the noxious plant kochia tumbleweeds were observed, and previous area noxious weed surveys by BPA noted this and other invasive plant species in the vicinity. Construction would likely disturb existing noxious plants and their seed banks and thus, pose a resource competition and displacement risk to native plant populations in the vicinity. If managed properly, the project construction would mitigate effects on native plants through control and monitoring of disturbed areas.

Notes:

- Remove the first foot of soil within the excavation boundaries of the expansion area and access road prism before excavating further. Haul and dispose of the soil removed at a BPA-approved facility.
- Seed the disturbed areas post-construction with a native seed mix appropriate for the site conditions. In the first growing season following expansion and access road construction (anticipated to be spring-summer 2023), search for and selectively treat all noxious and invasive plants in the project's disturbed areas. Plan up to three treatments to maximize potential of finding the most leafed out plants before setting seeds. As schedules and funding allow, follow up with the same treatment in the following 2024 growing season.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: During project scoping, it was thought that Washington ground squirrel or burrowing owl – both Washington State Candidates for listing as Threatened – could occur near the substation and project area. A pedestrian survey of all planned project areas with a Washington Department of Natural Resources biologist found no signs of use by either species. Nesting ferruginous hawks – Washington-listed Endangered – have occurred within 0.6 miles of the project area. The project would not affect this historical nest location, and no nests were observed during the pedestrian survey of the project area; however, it is prudent to survey a 0.25-mile buffer of the project area prior to construction to ensure not disturbing this sensitive species.

Notes:

- All noise-producing and ground-disturbing work is currently scheduled to take place outside of ferruginous hawk breeding season of late April through mid-September. If this plan changes to different timeframes, contact the EC and EP leads to determine next steps.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Exposed soils from construction activities would be managed using appropriate BMPs to reduce the potential for runoff of soil to local waterways. The stormwater retention/infiltration pond facility would be constructed to allow developed substation yard runoff to settle out, and the water to infiltrate slowly. There are no discernible perennial surface water features within 0.3 miles of the planned substation boundary; this combined with the stormwater controls through construction and operations would result in no effect to water bodies or fish. Because BPA would increase the overall impermeable area by constructing the expansion, there could theoretically be a minimal effect to floodplains. Because the total new area is only about 0.7 (0.5 acre of new substation yard and 0.2 acre of new access road) acre and the runoff would be managed by retention and infiltration, there would be no effects on the floodplain.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There are no wetlands in or near the project's footprint.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: A geotechnical boring analysis during the typical wet season (January 2020) encountered no groundwater through to the basalt bedrock between about six to eleven feet below ground. At a six-foot depth – the planned excavation extent for the new substation yard area – there would be no groundwater interception during the dry construction season, and an aquifer, if present, would be below the level of flowing groundwater. If groundwater is encountered, all appropriate BMPs would be used to protect the resource from hazardous substances that may be present in the excavation profile or that may leak from equipment.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be no effect to land use and specially-designated areas. The land being sought by BPA for development of the substation expansion is grazed periodically by livestock under permit from the WDNR and is otherwise left as natural open space. Expanding an existing substation by 50% its current size to approximately 1.5 acres in total area (plus 0.2 acre of new access road) neither would represent a notable increase in developed area within the open landscape here, nor would it reduce grazing areas to a notable degree.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The additional infrastructure planned under the project would not create new types of scenic disruption, but would increase the existing type's footprint in vistas. Over the scale of the background open landscape, the change would go unnoticed by casual observers.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be only temporary and localized reduction in air quality as active construction takes place and fossil fuel-burning equipment is running. Quick dilution and mixing of the exhaust into the air column would readily occur since topography is largely flat in a wide radius around the site, and the vegetation is low.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: There would be loud noise generated during periods of the construction; however, the surrounding area is uninhabited by individuals or businesses. Effects of noise to random pedestrians or cyclists in the vicinity would be temporary and occur only occasionally during the construction timeframe.

12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Any work done by BPA or contracted crews is only permitted when adherence to all applicable BPA and OSHA safety guidelines can be assured. Excess soil and concrete generated from within the substation fence would be tested by BPA to characterize potential hazardous substances so that they can be contained and processed in accordance with EPA standards.

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: The WDNR has been engaged since the early scoping process to advance the land purchase and transfer from WDNR to BPA of the parcel sections planned for new development. In the existing substation, BPA is the landowner in fee.

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

Signed: */s/ Michael J. O'Connell* *April 19, 2022*
Michael J. O'Connell, ECT-4 Date
Environmental Protection Specialist