

# Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration  
Department of Energy



**Proposed Action:** Columbia Falls 115kV Substation Expansion

**Project No.:** P02326

**Project Manager:** Sarah Sprague – TEPS-TPP-1

**Location:** Flathead County, MT

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

**Description of the Proposed Action:** The Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to expand the existing Columbia Falls 115kV substation to accommodate additional equipment needed to ensure reliable grid operation following the removal of the Conkelley Substation and other transmission changes in the region. The proposed project would construct an annex to the existing control house at Columbia Falls substation. The new annex would be connected to the existing control house by a breezeway, and would include updated controls and communications equipment to operate the substation. The annex control house would be approximately 2,200 square feet including a garage for storage of a snowplow and truck. The addition of the annex and breezeway would necessitate shifting the substation fence outward approximately 100 feet to the north and about 100 feet to the west from its existing location. The expansion area would be approximately 0.25 acres.

**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/ Doug Corkran*

Doug Corkran, ECT-4  
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

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Katey C. Grange  
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:** Columbia Falls 115kV Substation Expansion

## **Project Site Description**

The project would occur at the existing Columbia Falls 115kV Substation. The substation is located on flat ground on old floodplain terraces of the Flathead River just west of where it exits the Swan Mountains. Land use in this area is a mix of rural residential developments, agricultural lands and higher density housing. The project would take place on the existing leveled and graveled substation yard area.

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

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: BPA archeologists determined that the proposed project would result in no historic properties affected on December 22, 2022. Consultation with the Montana SHPO and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes was completed on January 22, 2023 with no comments received. No impacts to historic and cultural resources are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance would take place within the existing flat and graveled substation area. No impacts to geology and soils beyond the previously-disturbed areas are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project would take place within the existing flat and graveled substation area, with no vegetation present. No impacts to plants are expected.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: No special-status wildlife species or habitats are present. Some nearby common wildlife species may be affected by construction disturbance; however, this disturbance would be temporary and no substantial impacts to any species are anticipated. Overall impacts to wildlife would be low.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located in an upland area outside of floodplains and away from streams and other water bodies. No impacts to water bodies, floodplain or fish would occur.

## **6. Wetlands**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The project is located in a dry upland area with no wetlands present. No impacts to wetlands would occur.

## **7. Groundwater and Aquifers**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: Ground disturbance would be limited to the existing level and graveled substation area. No shallow groundwater or aquifers are located in the area and the project would not use or create hazardous materials or conditions that could affect groundwater. The proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

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

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could briefly impact nearby residential and agricultural land uses due to construction noise, access restrictions, and increased construction traffic. The proposed action would be consistent with current surrounding land uses and no permanent changes in land use would occur. The proposed action would not impact land use or specially-designated areas.

## **9. Visual Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the presence of construction equipment and general construction activities would briefly cause temporary visual impacts. The new substation annex would be visible from nearby residences, but the annex would be consistent with existing infrastructure and equipment in the substation and surrounding area. The proposed action would have a low impact on long term visual quality.

## **10. Air Quality**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a minor and temporary increase in fugitive dust and emissions in the local area from general construction activities. Standard construction BMPs would suppress dust. There would be no long-term change in air quality after construction of the proposed action is completed.

## **11. Noise**

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, the use of vehicles and equipment, and the performance of general construction activities would temporarily and intermittently produce noise at levels slightly higher than current ambient conditions. Construction-related noise may be audible from properties located near the substation, including residential and agricultural properties, but work would take place during regular business hours and would be limited

to the construction period so impacts to nearby properties would be low. There would be no long-term change in ambient noise following completion of the project.

## 12. Human Health and Safety

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: All standard safety protocols would be followed throughout project construction, and standard construction BMPs would minimize risk to human health and safety. The proposed action would have no impact on human health and safety.

### **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 proposed action would occur on existing BPA fee-owned ROW and substation property. BPA would notify nearby property owners as needed if access to the local area would be temporarily disrupted by construction.

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

Signed: /s/ Doug Corkran March 1, 2023  
Doug Corkran, ECT-4 Date  
Environmental Protection Specialist