

Categorical Exclusion Determination

Bonneville Power Administration
Department of Energy



Proposed Action: Benton-Scooteney No. 1 Transmission Line Rebuild (*Update to previous CX issued on September 9, 2021*)

Project No.: P00837

Project Manager: Scott A. Lissit, TEPF-3

Location: Benton and Franklin counties, Washington

Categorical Exclusion Applied (from Subpart D, 10 C.F.R. Part 1021): B1.3 Routine maintenance; B1.13 Pathways, short access roads, and rail lines; B1.24 Property transfers; B3.2 Aviation activities; B4.13 Upgrading and rebuilding existing powerlines

Description of the Proposed Action: Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) proposes to rebuild its approximately 20-mile-long, 115-kilovolt (kV) Benton-Scooteney No. 1 transmission line in Benton and Franklin counties, Washington. Portions of the existing line have deteriorated due to age, and rebuilding the line is required to ensure safe and reliable electrical transmission. The proposed project would include:

- Removing 157 existing and installing 152 new wood H-frame transmission structures
- Removing 7 existing and installing 13 new three-pole deadend structures and associated guy wires and anchors
- Installing two new line disconnect switch structures and line switches at the Connell Tap and removing the existing maintenance shoofly structure
- Reinforcing the existing steel-lattice transmission structures 1/2 and 1/3 and installing new fall protection on each structure
- Removing and restringing conductor and overhead ground wire, which would require 17 pulling and tensioning sites
- Installing 26 temporary wood, H-frame guard structures, which would be removed after conductor stringing is complete
- Constructing approximately 0.25 mile of new access road, reconstructing about 3.6 miles of existing roads in poor condition, and improving about 0.25 mile of existing access roads that need only minor surface work
- Constructing one new approximately 3.5-acre materials and equipment staging area
- Acquiring a temporary lease for the staging area and new access road easements, where needed

Project construction would include the use of bulldozers, dump trucks, road graders, roller compactors, backhoes, truck-mounted augers, boom trucks, cranes, and light-duty work trucks. Helicopters may be used to string the conductor, if required. All helicopter landing sites would be located in existing paved or graveled areas, and no specially prepared landings would be required.

This CX has been updated to include an additional proposed action. BPA would acquire transmission line easements, where needed.

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/ W. Walker Stinnette
W. Walker Stinnette
Environmental Protection Specialist

Concur:

<u>/s/ Sarah T. Biegel</u>	<u>May 10, 2023</u>
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: Benton-Scooteney No. 1 Transmission Line Rebuild (*Update to previous CX issued on September 9, 2021*)

Project Site Description

The project site includes BPA's existing Benton-Scooteney No. 1 transmission line right-of-way (ROW), access roads, a materials and equipment staging area (to be constructed), and some off-ROW pulling and tensioning sites. The ROW begins at BPA's Benton Substation, which is located on the DOE Hanford Nuclear Reservation (Hanford Site) in Benton County, Washington. The ROW crosses the Columbia River east of Benton Substation between structures 1/2 and 1/3 and continues northeast until its termination at BPA's Scooteney Substation on Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) land in Franklin County, Washington.

Relatively undisturbed portions of the project site, primarily between Benton Substation and structure 1/2 on the Hanford Site, between structures 1/3 and 2/2 east of the Columbia River, between structures 2/7 and 3/1, and between structure 19/2 and Scooteney Substation on the WDNR property, are not under active cultivation and experience less human disturbance. Although these areas contain more native vegetation and relatively higher quality habitat than other portions of the project site, most still lack a large sagebrush (*Atemisia spp.*) component likely due to cattle grazing and other disturbances.

The majority of the project site, including between structures 2/2 and 2/7, between structures 3/1 and 19/2, and the staging area, consists of irrigated agricultural lands or heavily disturbed lands intersected by paved and unpaved roads and irrigation ponds, canals, and ditches. These areas contain little, if any, native vegetation and are dominated by row crops or non-native species. Outside of the project site, the surrounding area has similar land uses along with some rural residential properties.

Evaluation of Potential Impacts to Environmental Resources

1. Historic and Cultural Resources

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: On May 12, 2020, BPA initiated National Historic Preservation Act, Section 106 consultation with the following parties:

- Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation
- Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation
- Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation
- Nez Perce Tribe
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) – Walla Walla District
- Wanapum Band of Indians

- Washington Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP)
- Washington Department of Natural Resources

A BPA historian and archaeologist determined that the proposed undertaking would cause no adverse effect to historic properties (BPA CR Project No.: WA 2017 045a; DAHP Log No.: 2020-02-1397). Recommendations and concurrence were received from Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation on July 20, 2021, from DAHP on July 27 and August 5, 2021, and from Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation on August 9, 2021. On August 19, 2021, DAHP Built Environment concurred that the Benton-Scootenev No. 1 Transmission Line is eligible for listing in the NRHP and concurred with BPA's determination. No other comments were received.

Notes:

- Maintain a cultural resources monitor on-site during any ground-disturbing activities near sites 45FR00655 and 45FR00656 and around structure 2/1 (identified as sensitive areas in the Mitigation Implementation Table [MIT] and photomaps).
- Implement a project-specific Inadvertent Discovery Plan (IDP) in the unlikely event that cultural material is encountered during the implementation of this project. BPA would require that work be halted in the vicinity of the finds until they can be inspected and assessed by BPA in consultation with the appropriate consulting parties. Contact one of the BPA EP environmental leads (see cover memo for contact information) and/or the BPA ECC archaeologist Katie Tipton, at 503-230-5708, for further required notifications, and ensure integrity of site and materials until further instructions are given.

2. Geology and Soils

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action could cause up to 100 acres of temporary soil disturbance; approximately 74 acres of which would occur within agricultural areas that are routinely disturbed by agricultural activities. The remaining temporary soil disturbance would occur within the margins of agricultural fields and other uncultivated areas. Soils that would be temporarily disturbed by the proposed action would stabilize as vegetation is reestablished and would eventually return to pre-existing conditions following completion of the project.

Permanent soil impacts would occur where the ground surface would be permanently compacted and/or covered in gravel, such as the new 3.5-acre staging area and approximately 13.5 acres associated with new and reconstructed access roads.

Notes:

- Implement a BPA-approved Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SWPPP) with associated Erosion and Sediment Control Plans that are guided by Washington Department of Ecology's Stormwater Management Manual for Eastern Washington.
- Avoid spreading augured soils in native plant communities and special-status species habitat (identified as sensitive areas in the MIT and photomaps). Use excavated soils for backfill or spread evenly no more than 10 feet from the wood-pole structure bases.
- Revegetate disturbed areas on public lands with a native, pollinator-friendly seed mix developed in coordination with land managers (i.e., DOE Hanford and WDNR) following completion of construction. On private land, BPA may revegetate with a native seed mix or a ground cover seed mix suitable for use in orchards and other cultivated areas, depending on landowner preference.
- Monitor seed germination until site stabilization is achieved, as defined by an appropriate level of cover by native or non-native species acceptable for this geographic area (i.e., make use of sterile hybrids in seed mix). If vegetative cover is inadequate, BPA may implement contingency measures and reseed to ensure adequate revegetation of disturbed soils, if required.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA conducted plant surveys of the project site in May and September 2020, and in April 2021 to identify potential special-status plant species, vegetation communities, and noxious weeds. Lowland toothcup (*Rotala ramosior*), which is listed as a State Sensitive species by the Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP), and grand redstem (*Ammannia robusta*), which is listed as a State Threatened species by the WNHP, were observed in September 2020 in areas that are seasonally inundated by the Columbia River near structure 1/3. Neither of these special-status species would be impacted by construction activities. No other special-status species were observed during the field surveys. No plant species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) are expected to occur within the project site.

The proposed action could temporarily crush, clear, or shade up to 100 acres of vegetation. Approximately 74 acres of disturbance would occur within cultivated agricultural areas that lack native vegetation. The remaining temporary disturbance would occur within the margins of agricultural fields and other uncultivated areas that have been previously disturbed by grazing or other activities, and therefore largely lack a large woody component and contain a greater abundance of exotic species than native grasses.

New permanent vegetation impacts would occur where the ground surface would be permanently covered in gravel, such as the new 3.5-acre staging area and approximately 0.8 acres associated with the new access road.

Notes:

- See notes in the Geology and Soils section above.
- Avoid known populations of the special-status grand redstem and lowland toothcup (identified as sensitive areas in the MIT and photomaps).
- Ensure the construction contractor installs “Sensitive Area” signage, fencing, and/or flagging around the known populations of special-status grand redstem and lowland toothcup, to restrict vehicles and equipment to designated routes and work areas.
- Conduct the majority of construction activities during the winter to minimize impacts on pollinators and above-ground portions of native plants, to minimize the effect on native plant seed production, and to minimize the risk of construction-related fire.
- Ensure vehicles and equipment are cleaned prior to the start of construction to minimize the introduction and spread of weeds. Clean vehicles and equipment as soon as possible after completion of the project. If, at any point during construction of the Benton-Scootenev transmission line, vehicles and equipment are temporarily used for work at another project site, then they should be cleaned prior to returning to the Benton-Scootenev project site.
- Use local sources of rock for road construction, if possible, and obtain road fill materials from noxious weed-free quarries.
- Cut or crush vegetation rather than blading or clearing areas that would be temporarily impacted.
- Treat noxious weeds within the entire project area (i.e., Benton-Scootenev transmission line ROW, along access roads, and at additional off-ROW work areas, including staging areas, new road construction areas, and pulling/tensioning sites) no more than two seasons prior to the start of construction.
- Treat noxious weeds within the entire project area (i.e., Benton-Scootenev transmission line ROW, along access roads, and at additional off-ROW work areas, including staging areas, new road construction areas, and pulling/tensioning sites) again within two years following completion of construction.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: BPA conducted wildlife surveys of the project site in June and September 2020, and in April 2021 to identify potential special-status wildlife species and habitats. Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), which are protected under the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, were already known to occupy a nest located near Benton Substation on the Hanford Site. An American white pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*), which is listed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife as a state-threatened species, was observed flying over agricultural land in June 2020. No other special-status species were observed during field surveys. No wildlife species protected under the Federal ESA are expected to occur near the project site.

The proposed action could impact wildlife through temporary and permanent habitat loss or modification, construction noise, spread of noxious weeds, and increased risk of bird collisions with the conductor due to increased structure height. While most wildlife species would likely be able to avoid construction areas and would only be temporarily disturbed by construction activities, some wildlife (primarily small burrowing mammals) could experience incidental mortality from ground disturbance. The majority of construction activities would occur between August 15 and March 1, which is outside of the breeding and nesting seasons for migratory birds.

Notes:

- Begin all work (including access road work) on the Hanford Site after August 16, to avoid impacting known bald eagle nesting sites.
- Conduct any orchard tree clearing associated with road construction, reconstruction, or improvement during the non-breeding season (generally after August 16 and before February 28), if possible.
- Restrict, as possible, construction activities (particularly helicopter use, if required) to the non-breeding season for most bird species (generally after August 16 and before February 28). If activities must occur when a nest is known to be active, project activities would conform to established guidelines regarding bird nests, including nest buffers and protective zones.
- Install bird flight diverters on the two outside conductor phases and both overhead ground wires for all spans between structure 1/1 and structure 2/1 and all spans between structure 2/7 and structure 3/1.

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

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The transmission line ROW crosses the Columbia River, Parson's Canyon drainage, and multiple irrigation canals and ditches. The Columbia River contains fish species protected under the Federal Endangered Species Act, including bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*), steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*), Chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*), and sockeye salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*). The Columbia River is designated critical habitat for all four of these fish species. However, no construction activities would occur within a water body or floodplain, and best management practices would prevent indirect impacts to water bodies, floodplains, and special-status fish.

Notes:

- See notes in the Geology and Soils section above.
- Install transmission structures 8/8, 8/11, 9/1, 12/4, 13/3, 15/6, and 17/2 with pole wraps and culvert footings to prevent leachate from entering nearby water bodies and wetlands.

- Maintain an oil/fuel spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.

6. Wetlands

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Wetlands were identified near structure 17/2 and in the seasonally inundated floodplains along the Columbia River. Although a formal wetland delineation was not conducted, approximate wetland boundaries were determined in the field based on topography and vegetation. Construction activities, including access road work, would not occur within the wetlands. Best management practices would prevent direct and indirect impacts to wetlands.

Notes:

- See notes in the Geology and Soils section above.
- Install transmission structures 8/8, 8/11, 9/1, 12/4, 13/3, 15/6, and 17/2 with pole wraps and culvert footings to prevent leachate from entering nearby water bodies and wetlands.
- Maintain an oil/fuel spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.
- Avoid known wetlands (identified as sensitive areas in the MIT and photomaps).
- Ensure the construction contractor installs “Sensitive Area” signage, fencing, and/or flagging around the known wetlands, to restrict vehicles and equipment to designated routes and work areas.
- Restrict construction activities to the minimum area needed given safety and construction requirements to avoid disturbance in wetlands.

7. Groundwater and Aquifers

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: Ground disturbance is unlikely to reach depths to groundwater and no new wells or other uses of groundwater or aquifers are proposed. Therefore, the proposed action would not impact groundwater or aquifers.

Notes:

- Maintain an oil/fuel spill kit on-site during construction to address containment, cleanup, and disposal in the event of a spill.

8. Land Use and Specially-Designated Areas

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action could temporarily impact agricultural and residential lands due to construction noise, access restrictions, increased construction traffic, and ground disturbance. These disturbances would primarily occur within the existing transmission line ROW and along access roads, with the exception of some off-ROW pulling and tensioning sites. Most construction activities would be completed in the fall and winter and would not cause crop damage or impacts to agricultural activities. BPA coordinated with farmers to design the rebuilt transmission line in such a way as to accommodate some agricultural land uses.

Permanent changes in land use would occur in some areas where access road improvement and reconstruction would require permanent removal of approximately 1 acre of crops or orchard trees that have been planted within the ROW. In addition, the new 3.5-acre staging area and 0.25-mile access road would be constructed in areas that are currently undeveloped, which would require a permanent change in land use.

The proposed action would not impact any specially-designated areas.

9. Visual Quality

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a perceptible change in the appearance of the project site. During construction, the presence of construction equipment and general construction activities, including vegetation disturbance, would cause temporary visual impacts. Constructing a new staging area and access road work would cause new permanent visual impacts from clearing vegetation and adding gravel surfacing. Although existing transmission structures would be replaced with similar structures in approximately the same locations, new transmission structures would be 10 to 20 feet taller than the existing structures and would be relocated in some cases. These permanent changes would be minor relative to the scale of the existing structures and equipment and would be consistent with the existing visual quality of the area.

10. Air Quality

Potential for Significance: No with Conditions

Explanation: The proposed action would cause a minor and temporary increase in dust and vehicle emissions in the local area from general construction activities. There would be no long-term change in air quality following completion of the proposed action.

Notes:

- Implement dust suppression measures as identified in the MIT and the SWPPP with associated Erosion and Sediment Control Plans.

11. Noise

Potential for Significance: No

Explanation: During construction, use of vehicles and equipment and general construction activities would create noise above current ambient conditions. Construction-related noise could be audible from residential properties located near the transmission line. Noise impacts would be temporary and intermittent and would only occur during typical working hours (approximately 7 AM to 7 PM). 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: Construction would be completed by trained professionals who would follow all applicable safety precautions as detailed in a site-specific Safety Plan, which would be prepared before the start of construction, maintained on-site during construction, and updated, as needed. The Safety Plan would include a Fire Prevention and Suppression Plan, and fire prevention and suppression equipment would be maintained on-site during construction. The general public would not be allowed in construction areas while work is ongoing, and work areas would be secured when construction crews are not present. Therefore, the proposed action would not be expected to impact 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: See Human Health and Safety above.

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: Although there is no known contamination on the Hanford Site near Benton Substation and the Benton-Scooteney No. 1 transmission line, DOE Hanford requires radiation testing for all areas on the Hanford Site. Therefore, all existing conductor, transmission structures, insulators, and excess soil that would be removed from the Hanford Site would be tested for radiation.

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 notified underlying landowners of the project in April 2020 and has been coordinating with landowners to design the rebuilt transmission line in such a way as to accommodate some agricultural land uses. Landowners would be notified before construction and provided with a general construction schedule and contact information in case of questions or concerns.

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

Signed: /s/ W. Walker Stinnette
W. Walker Stinnette, ECT-4
Environmental Protection Specialist

May 10, 2023
Date